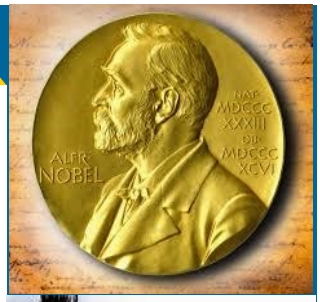
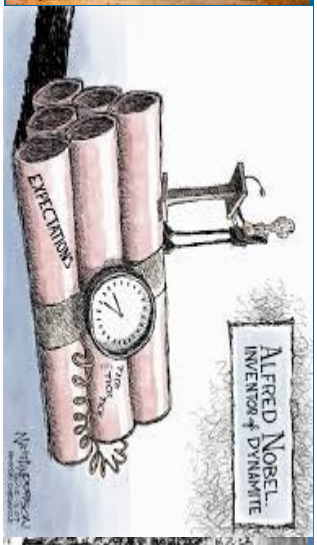
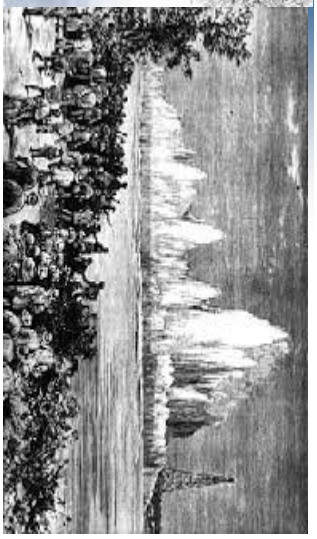
English

NOBEL Laureates







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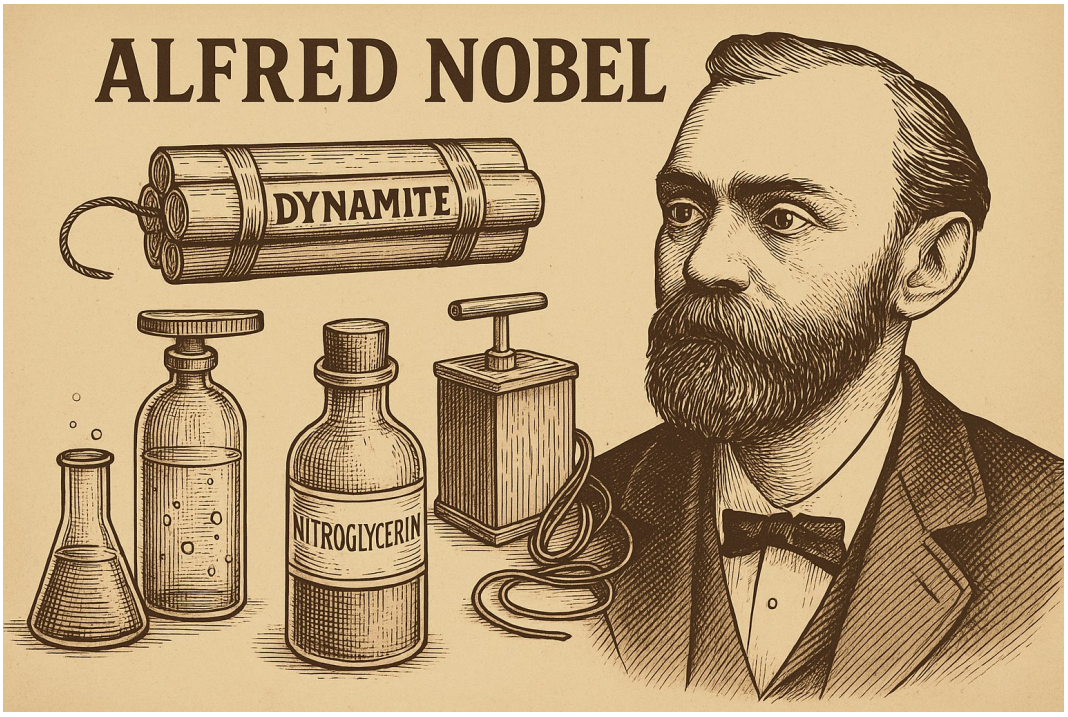
Periyar E.V.R. High Road, Maduravoyal, Chennai-95. Tamilnadu, India.

ENGLISH
Nobel Laureates

Conceived, Designed & Executed by:
Prof Dr S Ramalingam
Joint Registrar - Languages



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ENGLISH
Nobel Laureates

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Dedication

ALFRED Bernhard NOBEL

21 Oct 1833 <<<:>>> 10 Dec 1896

" Contentment is the only real wealth."

" It is not sufficient to be worthy of respect in order to be respected."

" Worry is the stomach's worst poison."

Kindly visit the Web Page to know MORE !

https://archive.org/details/full-book-alfred-nobel

There are many different theories about why the Nobel created the Prize. A Nobel Prize winner himself, Albert Einstein, said that "**Alfred Nobel invented an explosive more powerful than any then known—an exceedingly effective means of destruction. To atone for this 'accomplishment' and to relieve his conscience, he instituted his award for the promotion of peace.**" This is a commonly held belief.

Alfred Nobel was a multi-facet personality i.e, inventor, entrepreneur, scientist, businessman and also, a literary author who also wrote poetry and drama. His varied interests are reflected in the prizes he established for the foundation he laid in 1895 when he wrote his last will, leaving most of his wealth to the establishment of the prizes.

Since 1901, the Nobel Prize has been honouring men and women from around the world for outstanding achievements in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and for work in peace.

Quick Facts

- Born: 21 October 1833
- Died: 10 December 1896
- Known for: inventing dynamite and holder of 355 patents
- Professions: chemist, inventor, engineer, entrepreneur, businessman, author
- Will: left 31 million Swedish kronor (SEK) to fund the prizes.

The last will and testament

Alfred Nobel signed his last will in Paris on 27 November 1895. He specified that the bulk of his fortune should be divided into five parts and to be used for prizes in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and peace to "those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred/contributed the greatest benefit to humankind."

Alfred found, through his experiments, that mixing nitroglycerine with a fine sand called *kieselguhr* would turn the liquid into paste which could be shaped into rods. These rods could then be inserted into drilling holes. The invention was made in 1866.

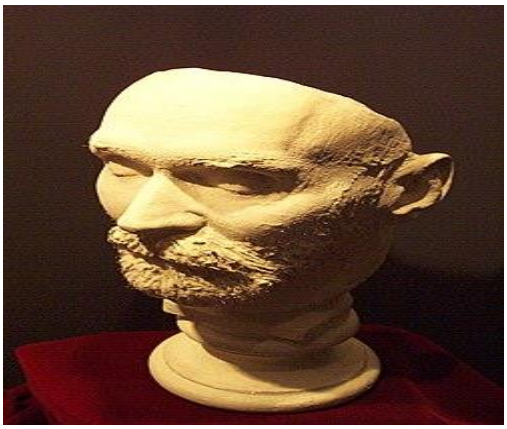
Alfred got a patent or legal right of ownership on this material the next year. He named it "dynamite." He also invented a detonator or blasting cap which could be set off by lighting a fuse. These inventions were made at a time when the diamond drilling crown and pneumatic drill came into general use. Together, these inventions helped reduce the cost of many construction work like drilling tunnels, blasting rocks, building bridges, etc.

The Nobel Prizes

Alfred died in San Remo, Italy on December 10, 1896. In his last will and testament, he wrote that much of his fortune was to be used to give prizes to those who have done their best for humanity in the cited five areas.

But subsequently some problems had been created. Everybody was not pleased with this. His will was opposed by his relatives and questioned by authorities in various countries. It took nearly four years for his executors to convince all parties to follow Alfred's wishes.

In 1901, the first Nobel Prizes in Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine and Literature were first awarded in Stockholm, Sweden and the Peace Prize in Kristiania (now Oslo), Norway.



Alfred Nobel's will, which stated that 94% of his total assets should be used to establish the Nobel Prizes.

The committee room of the Norwegian Nobel Committee

Wilhelm Röntgen, who received the first
Nobel Prize in Physics for his discovery of the X-ray

The Nobel diploma awarded to Wilhelm Röntgen in 1901

Nobel laureates receive a diploma directly from the hands of the King of Sweden, or in the case of the peace prize, the chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee. Each diploma is uniquely designed by the prize-awarding institutions for the laureates that receive them. The diploma contains a picture and text in Swedish which states the name of the laureate and normally a citation of why they received the prize. None of the Nobel Peace Prize laureates has ever had a citation on their diplomas.

Table at the 2005 Nobel_Banquet in Stockholm

After the award ceremony in Sweden, a banquet is held in the Blue Hall at the Stockholm City

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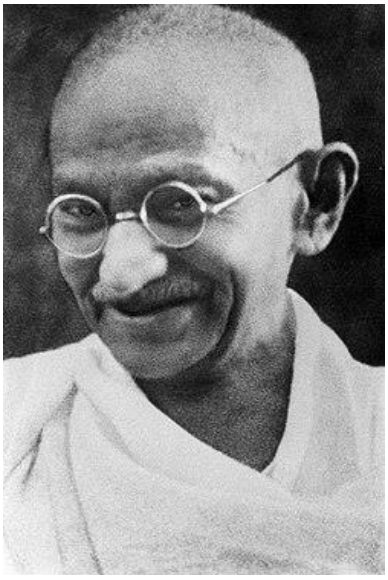


Mahatma Gandhi, although nominated five times, was never awarded a Nobel Peace Prize.

Although Mohandas Gandhi, an icon of nonviolence in the 20th century, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times, in 1937, 1938, 1939, 1947, and a few days before he was assassinated on 30 January 1948, he was never awarded the prize. In 1948, the year of Gandhi's death, the Norwegian Nobel Committee decided to make no award that year on the grounds that "**there was no suitable living candidate**". In 1989, this omission was publicly regretted, when the 14th Dalai Lama was awarded the Peace Prize, the chairman of the committee said that it was

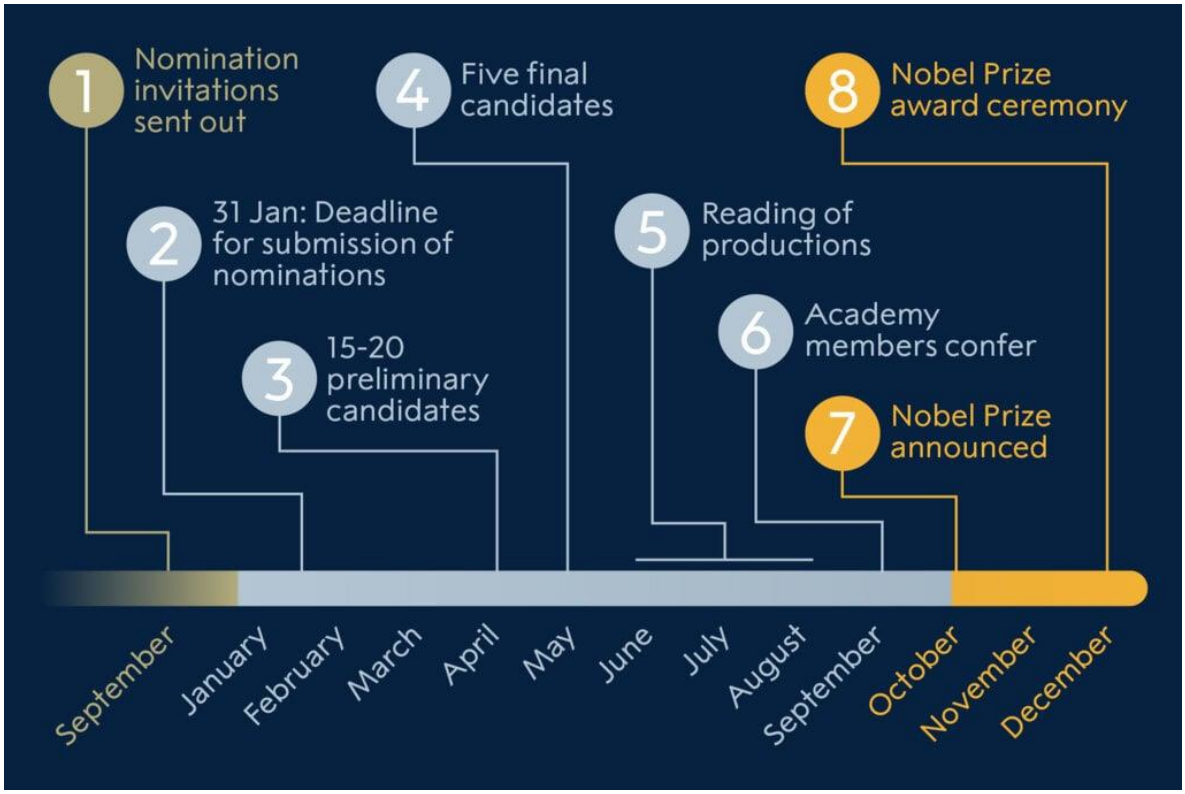
"in part a tribute to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi". Geir Lundestad, 2006 Secretary of Norwegian Nobel Committee, said,

…The greatest omission in our 106-year history is undoubtedly that Mahatma Gandhi never received the Nobel Peace Prize……

"Gandhi could do without the Nobel Peace Prize.
Whether the Nobel Committee can do without Gandhi, is the question."

The Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded 118 times to 122 Nobel Prize Laureates between 1901 and 2025.

Selection Process of Nobel Prize for Literature



The nomination process for Nobel Prize laureates in literature.

Below is a brief description of the process involved in choosing the Nobel Prize Laureates in Literature.

September – *Invitation letters are sent out*. The Nobel Committee sends out nomination forms to hundreds of individuals and organizations qualified to nominate for the Nobel Prize in Literature.
February – *Deadline for submission*. The completed forms must reach the Nobel Committee not later than 31 January of the following year. The

Committee then screens the nominations and submits a list for approval by the Academy.
April – *Preliminary candidates*. After further studies, the Committee selects 15–20 names for consideration as preliminary candidates by the Academy.
May – *Final candidates*. The Committee whittles down the list to five priority candidates to be considered by the Academy.
June-August – *Reading of productions*. The members of the Academy read and assess the work of the final candidates during the summer. The Nobel Committee also prepares individual reports.
September – *Academy members confer*. Having read the work of the final candidates, members of the Academy discuss the merits of the different candidates' contribution.
October – *Nobel Prize laureates are chosen*. In early October, the Academy chooses the Nobel Prize laureate in literature. A candidate must receive more than half of the votes cast. The Nobel Prize laureates names are then announced.
December – *Nobel Prize laureates receive their prize*. The Nobel Prize award ceremony takes place on 10 December in Stockholm, where the Nobel Prize laureates receive their Nobel Prize, which consists of a Nobel Prize medal and diploma, and a document confirming the prize amount.

This book, "***ENGLISH Nobel Laureates***" covers THIRTY men and women who got Nobel Prize in English [Literature]. The Content itself covers the most vital/important information of each candidate. Afterwards, the highly relevant information/details of each laureate are systematically compiled and given so that the readers would read and enjoy these details. Further, the relevant web page of each member is provided through which the readers could visit the actual site of these thirty persons. Aptly the book is dedicated to Alfre Nobel and here, a web page of a book – which was published by the department of Chemistry of our University in 2024 – entitled "***Alfred Bernhard Nobel***" is provided to enable the readers to know more about him.

I do appreciate and congratulate the Compiler of the Book and the publisher, Department of Management Studies of our University. The staff and research scholars of the department of English of our University would find this book very informative and useful in their academic life.

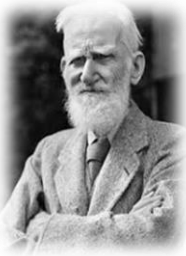
Prof Dr S Geethalakshmi
Vice-Chancellor
Dr MGR Educational and Research University
Chennai – 600 095, INDIA

INFO containing THIRTY

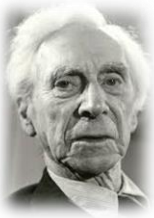
Nobel Laureates in English

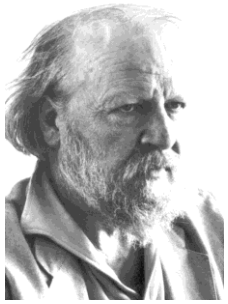
- Names and Photographs
- DoB and DoD
- Year of the Nobel Prize
- Citation of the Nobel Committee
- Web Page in the NobelPrize.org
- Details in the NobelPrize.org
- Links to other selected Web Pages
- Award Ceremony Speech
- Nobel Prize Lecture
- Bibliography
- Web Pages linking their Books
- Awards, Honours, etc. received
- Web Pages in their Names
- Awards, Museums, etc., in their Names
- Videos containing some important Events, Movies, etc.

Nobel Prize in English

Year/Photo	Details	Page
	Name / Citation	
1907	30 Dec 1865 **Rudyard Kipling** 18 Jan 1936 **"in consideration of the power of observation, originality of imagination, virility of ideas and remarkable talent for narration which characterize the creations of this world-famous author"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1907/kipling/facts/	001
1913	7 May 1861 **Rabindranath Tagore** 7 Aug 1941 **"because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/tagore/facts/	016
1923	13 Jun 1865 **William Butler Yeats** 28 Jan 1939 **"for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1923/yeats/facts/	055
1925 	26 Jul 1856 **George Bernard Shaw** 2 Nov 1950 **"for his work which is marked by both idealism and humanity, its stimulating satire often being infused with a singular poetic beauty"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1925/shaw/facts/	076
1930	7 Feb 1885 **Sinclair Lewis** 10 Jan 1951 **"for his vigorous and graphic art of description and his ability to create, with wit and humour, new types of characters"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1930/lewis/facts/	110
1932	14 Aug 1867 **John Galsworthy** 31 Jan 1933	

	"for his distinguished art of narration which takes its highest form in The Forsyte Saga" https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1932/galsworthy/facts/	**136**
1936 	16 Oct 1888 **Eugene O'Neill** 27 Nov 1951 **"for the power, honesty and deep-felt emotions of his dramatic works, which embody an original concept of tragedy** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1936/oneill/facts/	**152**
1938 	26 Jun 1892 **Pearl S Buck** 6 Mar 1973 **"for her rich and truly epic descriptions of peasant life in China and for her biographical masterpieces"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1938/buck/facts/	**176**
1948 	26 Sep 1888 **TS Eliot** 4 Jan 1965 **"for his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1948/eliot/facts/	**209**
1949 	25 Sep 1897 **William Faulkner** 6 Jul 1962 **"for his powerful and artistically unique contribution to the modern American novel"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/faulkner/facts/	**232**
1950		

	18 May 1872 **Bertrand Russell** 2 Feb 1970 **"in recognition of his varied and significant writings in which he champions humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1950/russell/facts/	**253**
1953 	30 Nov 1874 **Winston Churchill** 24 Jan 1965 **"for his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1953/churchill/facts	**287**
1954 	21 Jul 1899 **Ernest Hemingway** 2 Jul 1961 **"for his mastery of the art of narrative, most recently demonstrated in The Old Man and the Sea, and for the influence that he has exerted on contemporary style"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1954/hemingway/facts/	**320**
1962 	27 Feb 1902 **John Steinbeck** 20 Dec 1968 **"for his realistic and imaginative writings, Combining as they do sympathetic humour and keen social perception"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1962/steinbeck/facts/	**348**
1969 	13 Apl 1906 **Samuel Beckett** 22 Dec 1989 **"for his writing, which - in new forms for the novel and drama - in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1969/beckett/facts/	**368**
1973		

	28 May 1912 **Patrick White** 30 Sep 1990 **"for an epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1973/white/facts/}	**387**
1976 	10 Jun 1915 **Saul Bellow** 5 Apr 2005 **"for the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture that are combined in his work"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1976/bellow/facts/	**411**
1983 	**19 Sep 1911** **William Golding** 19 Jun 1993 **"for his novels which, with the perspicuity of realistic narrative art and the diversity and universality of myth, illuminate the human condition in the world of today"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1983/golding/facts/	**439**
1986 	**13 Jul 1934** **Wole Soyinka** **Aged 91 years** **"who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1986/soyinka/facts/	**463**
1987 	**24 May 1940** **Joseph Brodsky** 28 Jan 1996 **"for an all-embracing authorship, imbued with clarity of thought and poetic intensity"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1987/brodsky/facts/	**506**

1991 	20 Nov 1923 **Nadine Gordimer** 13 Jul 2014 **"who through her magnificent epic writing has - in the words of Alfred Nobel - been of very great benefit to humanity"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1991/gordimer/facts/	**547**
1992 	23 Jan 1930 **Sir Derek Walcott** 17 Mar 2017 **"for a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1992/walcott/facts/	**597**
1993 	13 Apl 1939 **Toni Morrison** 5 Aug 2019 **"who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/facts/	**648**
1995 	13 Apl 1939 **Seamus Heaney** 30 Aug 2013 **"for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1995/heaney/facts/	**673**
2001 	17 Aug 1932 **VS Naipaul** 11 Aug 2018 **"for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2001/naipaul/facts/	**719**

2003 	9 Feb 1940 **John M Coetzee** Age 85 years **"who in innumerable guises portrays the surprising involvement of the outsider"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2003/coetzee/facts/	**766**
2005 	10 Oct 1930 **Harold Pinter** 24 Dec 2008 **"who in his plays uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into oppression's closed rooms"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2005/pinter/facts/	**793**
2007 	22 Oct 1919 **Doris Lessing** 17 Nov 2013 **"that epicist of the female experience, who with skepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilization to scrutiny"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/facts/	**825**
2013 	10 Jul 1931 **Alice Munro** 13 May 2024 **"master of the contemporary short story"** 1/1https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2013/munro/facts/	**865**
2016 	24 May 1941 **Bob Dylan** Aged 84 years **"for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition"** https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2016/dylan/facts	**906**

30 Dec 1865

18 Jan 1936

Rudyard Kipling

Nobel Prize in Literature 1907

Born: 30 December 1865, Bombay, British India (now Mumbai, India)
Died: 18 January 1936, London, United Kingdom
Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom
Prize motivation:

"in consideration of the power of observation, originality of imagination, virility of ideas and remarkable talent for narration which characterize the creations of this world-famous author"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1907/kipling/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1903, by Edwin Arnold
- Literature 1904, by Edwin Arnold
- Literature 1905, by William Loftie
- Literature 1907, by Charles Oman

Links to other sites

[01] On Rudyard Kipling from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] The Kipling Society
[03] On Rudyard Kipling from BBC History

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by C.D. af Wirsén,
Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, on December 10, 1907

{ https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1907/ceremony-speech/}

The suggestions for names of suitable recipients of this year's Nobel Prize in Literature have been numerous, and there has been no dearth of exceedingly well-qualified candidates for this honourable and coveted distinction.

From these candidates, the Swedish Academy has selected for this occasion a writer who belongs to Great Britain. For centuries past the literature of England has flourished and blossomed with marvellous luxuriance. When Tennyson's immortal lyre was silenced forever, the cry which is so customary at the passing of literary giants was raised. With him the glorious reign of poetry is over; there is none to take up the mantle. Similar despairing notes were struck in this country on the demise of Tegnér, but it is not so with the fair goddess Poetry. She does not perish, is not deposed from her high estate; she but arrays herself in a fresh garb to suit the altered tastes of a new age.

In the works of Tennyson idealism is so pervasive that it meets the eye in a very palpable and direct form. Traits of idealism, however, may be traced in the conceptions and gifts of writers who differ widely from him, such writers who seem primarily concerned with mere externals and who have won renown especially for their vivid word-picturings of the various phases of the strenuous, pulsating life of our own times, that life which is often chequered and fretted by the painful struggle for existence and by all its concomitant worries and embarrassments. This description applies to Rudyard Kipling, to whom the Swedish Academy has awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature this year. Of him a French author, who has devoted much time and study to English literature, wrote more than six years ago: «He, Kipling, is undoubtedly the most noteworthy figure that has appeared within recent years in the domain of English literature.»

Kipling was born in Bombay on December 30, 1865. At the age of six he was placed in the care of some relatives in England, but he returned to India on reaching the age of seventeen. He obtained a position on the staff of *The Civil and Military Gazette*, published at Lahore, and in his early twenties edited *The Pioneer* at Allahabad. In his capacity as a journalist, and for his own purposes, he travelled extensively throughout India. On those journeys he acquired a thorough insight into Hindu conceptions and sentiments and became intimately acquainted with the different Hindu groups, with their varying customs and institutions, and with the special features of English military life in India. This firm grasp of the true inwardness of all things Indian is abundantly

reflected in Kipling's writings, so much so that it has even been said that they have brought India nearer home to the English nation than has the construction of the Suez Canal. Of his early works the satirical *Departmental Ditties* (1886) attracted notice by the audacity of the allusions it contained, and by the originality of its tone. Also among the early productions are *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888) and *Soldiers Three* (1888), collections of stories famous among other things for the three lovingly drawn soldier types: Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd. Other works in the same category are, for instance, *The Story of the Gadsbys* (1888), In *Black and White* (1888), and *Under the Deodars* (1889), all of which are concerned with society life in Simla. The series entitled Life's Handicap, embracing some stories of serious import, appeared in 1891. The same year saw the publication of *The Light that Failed*, a novel somewhat harsh in style but containing some strongly coloured descriptive passages of excellent effect. As a poet Kipling was already full-fledged at the appearance of *Barrack Room Ballads* (1892), magnificent soldier-songs brimming over with virile humour and depicting realistically Tommy Atkins in all his phases, valiantly marching onward to encounter dangers and misery wherever it pleases «the Widow of Windsor», or her successor on the throne, to dispatch him. In Kipling the British Army has found a minstrel to interpret in a new, original, and tragicomical manner the toils and deprivations through which it has to pass, and to depict its life and work with abundant acknowledgment of the great qualities it displays, but without the least trace of meretricious embellishment. In his verses descriptive of soldiers and sailors he so happily expresses their own thoughts, often in the very language they themselves employ, that they appreciate him deeply and, as we are told, sing his song whenever they have a pause in the day's occupations. Surely, there is hardly any greater mark of honour that can be given to a poet than to be beloved by the lower orders.

In the cycle entitled *The Seven Seas* (1896) Kipling reveals himself as an imperialist, a citizen of a world-wide empire. He has undoubtedly done more than any other writer of pure literature to draw tighter the bonds of union between England and her colonies.

In Sweden, as elsewhere, «the jungle books» by Kipling, the first of which appeared in 1894, are much admired and beloved. A primordial type of imaginative power inspired the creator of these mythlike tales of the animals in whose midst Mowgli waxed in strength: Bagheera the Black Panther, Baloo the Bear, Kaa the cunning and mighty Rock-Python, Nag the White Cobra, and the chattering, foolish Monkeys. Some of the scenes are simply sublime; for instance, the one where Mowgli is resting in «the living armchair» Kaa, while the latter, who has witnessed so many generations of trees and animals, dreams of bygone ages; or again when Mowgli causes Hathi the Elephant to «let in the jungle» to take over the fields of men. These descriptions display an instinctive feeling for a poetry of nature which is quite phenomenal, and Kipling is far more in his true element in the primeval grandeur of these jungle stories than, for instance, in «The Ship that Found Herself» (in *The Day's Work*, 1898), an interesting though eccentric personification of mechanical inventions. *The Jungle Book* tales have made Kipling a favourite author among children in many countries. Adults share the delight experienced by the young and relive their childhood while perusing these marvellously delightful, wonderfully imaginative fables of animals.

Among the large number of Kipling's creations, *Kim* (1901) deserves special notice, for in the delineation of the Buddhist priest, who goes on a pilgrimage along the banks of the stream that purifies from sin, there is an elevated diction as well as a tenderness and charm which are otherwise unusual traits in this dashing writer's style. There is, too, in the figure of the little rascal Kim, the priest's chela, a thorough type of good-humoured roguishness.

The accusation has occasionally been made against Kipling that his language is at times somewhat coarse and that his use of soldier's slang in some of the broadest of his songs and ballads verges on the vulgar. Though there may be some truth in such remarks, their importance is offset by the invigorating directness and ethical stimulus of Kipling's style. He has won immense popularity, not only in the Anglo-Indian world, which possesses in him a great literary master, but also far beyond the limits of the vast British Empire. During his serious illness in America in 1899, the American newspapers issued daily bulletins regarding his condition, and the German Emperor dispatched a telegram to his wife to express his earnest sympathy.

What is then the cause of this world-wide popularity that Kipling enjoys? Or, rather: In what way has Kipling shown himself to deserve it? How is it, too, that he has been deemed worthy of the Nobel Prize in Literature, for which a writer must especially show an idealism in his conceptions and in his art? The answer follows:

Kipling may not be eminent essentially for the profundity of his thought or for the surpassing wisdom of his meditations. Yet even the most cursory observer sees immediately his absolutely unique power of observation, capable of reproducing with astounding accuracy the minutest detail from real life. However, the gift of observation alone, be it ever so closely true to nature, would not suffice as a qualification in this instance. There is something else by which his poetical gifts are revealed. His marvellous power of imagination enables him to give us not only copies from nature but also visions out of his own inner consciousness. His landscapes appear to the inner vision as sudden apparitions do to the eye. In sketching a personality he makes clear, almost in his first words, the peculiar traits of that person's character and temper. Creativeness which does not rest content with merely photographing the temporary phases of things but desires to penetrate to their inmost kernel and soul, is the basis of his literary activity, as Kipling himself says: «He draws the thing as he sees it for the God of things as they are.» In these weighty words lies a real appreciation of the poet's responsibility in the exercise of his calling.

Rudyard Kipling's manly, at times brusque, energy does not preclude tenderness and delicacy of touch, though these qualities never clamour affectedly for recognition in his works. The simple «Story of Muhammad Din» is imbued with the poetry of genuine heartfelt emotion, and who can ever forget the little drummer boys in «The Taking of Lungtumpen» (in *Plain Tales*)?

In the innermost being of this indefatigable observer of life and human nature vibrate strings attuned to a lofty note. His poem «To the True Romance» reveals that yearning

for a patiently sought, never to be attained ideal that resides in living form in the breast of every true poet, from where the scenes and impressions of the sensuous world can never dislodge it:

Enough for me in dreams to see
And touch thy garment's hem:
Thy feet have trod so near to God
I may not follow them!

This writer's philosophy of life is diffused with a piety characteristic of the Old Testament, or rather perhaps of Puritan times, wholly devoid of pretentiousness or wordiness, based upon a conviction that «the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom» and that there exists a

God of our fathers, known of old,
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
Dominion…

If Kipling is an idealist from an aesthetic point of view by reason of poetical intuition, he is so, too, from an ethical-religious standpoint by virtue of his sense of duty, which has its inspiration in a faith firmly rooted in conviction. He is acutely conscious of the truth that even the mightiest states would perish unless they rested upon the sure foundation in the citizens' hearts of a loyal observance of the law and a reasoned self-restraint. For Kipling, God is first and foremost Almighty Providence, termed in *Life's Handicap* a «Greet Overseer». The English as a nation can well appreciate these conceptions, and Kipling has become the nation's poet, owing not only to his numerous highly prized soldier-songs, but perhaps quite as much to the brief lines of the hymn («Recessional») which he composed on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Especially striking are these words expressing genuine and humble religious feelings:

The tumult and the shouting dies;
The Captains and the Kings depart:
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.

The recessional hymn voices the spirit of national pride, yet it also conveys a warning against the dangers of presumptuous pride…

Quite naturally, during the Boer War Kipling sided with his own nation, the English. He has, however, done full justice to the heroic courage of he Boers, for his imperialism is not of the uncompromising type that pays no regard to the sentiments of others.

Many and varied are the movements that have had their vogue in English literature, a literature unparalleled for wealth of output and adorned to surpass all others by the immortal figure of Shakespeare. In Kipling may be traced perhaps more of Swift and Defoe than of Spenser, Keats, Shelley, or Tennyson. Clearly, however, imagination is as strong in him as empirical observation. Though he does not possess the refined and sensuously beautiful style of Swinburne, yet he escapes, on the other hand, all tendency toward a pagan worship of pleasure for pleasure's sake. He avoids all morbid sentimentality in matter and Alexandrian super florescence in form.

Kipling favours concreteness and concentration; empty abstractions and circumlocutionary descriptions are wholly absent from his works. He has a knack for finding the telling phrase, the characteristic epithet, with swift accuracy and certainty. He has been compared now to Bret Harte, now to Pierre Loti, now to Dickens; he is, however, always original, and it would seem that his powers of invention are inexhaustible. Nevertheless, the apostle of the imagination is likewise, as stated above, the standard-bearer of law-abidingness and discipline. The Laws of the Jungle are the Laws of the Universe; if we ask what their chief purport is, we shall receive the brief answer: «Struggle, Duty, Obedience». Kipling thus advocates courage, self-sacrifice, and loyalty; unmanliness and lack of self-discipline are abominations to him, and in the world order he perceives a nemesis before which presumption is constrained to surrender.

If Kipling is quite independent as a writer, it does not follow that he has learned nothing from others; even the greatest masters have done so. With Bret Harte, Kipling shares his appreciation of the picturesqueness of vagabond life, and with Defoe his accuracy in depicting every detail and his sense of the values of exactness in the use of terms and phrases. Like Dickens he feels a keen sympathy with those of low degree in the community, and like him he can perceive the humour in trifling traits and acts. But his style is distinctively original and personal. It accomplishes its ends by suggestion rather than by description. It is not quite uniformly brilliant but it is always eminently expressive and picturesque. The series *From Sea to Sea* (1899) is a veritable model of graphic description, whether the scene is laid in the Elephant City governed by the Grand Divinity of Laziness, in Palm Island, or in Singapore, or whether the story deals with manners and customs of Japan. Kipling has at his command a large fund of irony – sometimes highly pungent – but he has abundant resources of sympathy, too, sympathy for the most part extended to those soldiers and sailors who have upheld the honour of England in far-distant lands. He has every right and reason to tell them: «I have eaten your bread and your salt, I have drunk your water and wine, I have lived your life, I have watched o'er your beds of death.»

He attained fame and success as a very young man, but he has continued to develop ever since. One of his biographers has stated that there are three «notes» to be traced in his authorship. The satirical note is found in *Departmental Ditties*, *Plain Tales from the Hills*, *The Story of the Gadsbys*, with its amusing commendation of single blessedness, and in the much-debated novel, *The Light that Failed*. The second, the note of sympathy and human kindness, is most clearly marked in «The Story of

Muhammad Din» and in «Without Benefit of Clergy» (in *Life's Handicap*), a gem of heartfelt emotion. The third, the ethical note, is clearly traceable in *Life's Handicap*. Whether there be much value or not in this classification which, as is usually the case in such matters, cannot be consistently applied to the whole of his production, one thing is certain: Kipling has written and sung of faithful labour, fulfilment of duty, and love of one's country. Love of one's country with Kipling does not mean solely devotion to the island kingdom of England, but rather an enthusiastic affection for the British Empire. The closer uniting of that Empire's separate members is a long and fervently cherished aspiration of the poet's. That is surely clear from his exclamation: «What should they know of England who only England know?»

Kipling has given us descriptions in vivid colours of many different countries. But the picturesque surface of things has not been the principal matter with him; he has always, in all places, had a manly ideal before him: ever to be «ready, ay ready at the call of duty» and then, when the appointed time comes, to «go to God like a soldier».

The Swedish Academy, in awarding the Nobel Prize in Literature this year to Rudyard Kipling, desires to pay a tribute of homage to the literature of England, so rich in manifold glories, and to the greatest genius in the realm of narrative that that country has produced in our times.

There was no banquet because of the death of King Oscar II of Sweden on December 8, 1907.

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Documentary

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1907/kipling/documentary/

When British writer Rudyard Kipling died on 18 January 1936 he was mourned by much of the English-speaking world. Although rarely filmed, this clip shows Kipling delivering a speech to the Canadian Author's Association.
(Sound is inaudible towards end of video clip. Our apologies.)

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Under the Deodars, 1888

The Phantom Rickshaw and Other Tales, 1888

Wee Willie Winkie and Other Child Stories, 1888

The Courting of Dinah Shadd and Other Stories, 1890

The Light That Failed, 1891

The City of Dreadful Night and Other Places, 1891

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The Naulahka : *A Story of West and East*, 1892 (with Wolcott Balestier)

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Screen Portrayals

- Reginald Sheffield portrayed Kipling in *Gunga Din* (1939)
- Paul Scardon portrayed Kipling in *The Adventures of Mark Twain* (1944)
- David Watson portrayed Kipling in *The Time Tunnel* episode "Night of the Long Knives" (1966)
- Christopher Plummer portrayed Kipling in *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975)
- David Haig portrayed Kipling in *My Boy Jack* (2007)
- Seán Cullen portrayed Kipling in the season 16 episode "The Write Stuff" of *Murdoch Mysteries* (2023)

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Kipling Trail

Kipling Trail

View of the Doon Valley

Length	5.5 miles (8.9 km)
Location	Uttarakhand

Trailheads	Shahanshahi Ashram, Rajpur, Dehradun
Use	Hiking
Highest point	Mussoorie, 2,005 m (6,578 ft)
Difficulty	Moderate to Strenuous
Season	All year
Sights	Doon Valley, diverse bird species, woodland flowers, Bougainvillea, *Quercus leucotrichophora* oaks
Hazards	Steep in places with forty-degree incline

Kipling Trail (also known as **Kipling Road**) is the old walking route that connects Dehradun with the hill station of Mussoorie in India. It was the only means of reaching Mussoorie before the cart roads, for tongas, or roads for automobiles were constructed. It is named after the English novelist Rudyard Kipling, who is believed to have walked the trail in the 1880s, though there is no definite evidence.[1] The trail fell out of use when cars or buses became the preferred mode of transport, but the route is being revived by nature, colonial history and hiking enthusiasts.[2]

History

View of the Doon Valley in the 1850s.

In the 1880s, novelist Rudyard Kipling is believed to have trekked this trail and the walk described in his novel *Kim* is thought to have been through this route. With the construction of an asphalt road in the early 20th-century, going right

up to Mussoorie, the heritage walking route gradually fell out of favour. Today, the path is being revived as it is increasingly being used by hikers and nature or history enthusiasts, who prefer walking up to the hill station over driving. In his book *The Kipling Road*, author Ruskin Bond explores the many stories of people who walked the old route from Rajpur to Mussoorie.

Route

The 9 km-trail takes between 2 and 3 hours to complete, and begins at Shahanshai Ashram in Rajpur village, Dehradun. It winds its way up through five steep inclines that are locally called *paanch kainchi*, Hindi for "five scissors".The halfway point is at Jharipani, which is surrounded by *Quercus leucotrichophora* or banjh oak forests. The path then leads to Barlowganj near St George's College, Mussoorie, then goes past Wynberg Allen School, finally reaching Mussoorie Library. Along the route lies an old railway tunnel, remnant of a failed project, and British-era rest houses. In 2017, parts of the trail were cemented without providing necessary outlets for drainage, and it was reported that road construction was "ruining the path's beauty".There were protests by the public, stating that vehicular traffic would harm the biodiversity along the route and change the nature of the heritage path.

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Books by Rudyard Kipling

[01] https://www.gutenberg.org/browse/scores/top

[02] https://rupapublications.co.in/book/the-definitive-rudyard-kipling

[03] https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/rudyard-kipling

[04] https://thegreatestbooks.org/authors/4766#google_vignette

[05] https://thegreatestbooks.org/authors/4766

[06] https://www.addall.com/books-in-order/rudyard-kipling/

[07]

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The Kipling Society

{https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/about.htm}

We offer a meeting place for people around the world who enjoy Kipling's writings, in Europe, in America, in India and beyond, at home in an armchair or in reading groups.

He was one of the world's great story-tellers, vivid, magical, witty and memorable. If you know little of his writings, you have a treat in store.

We hold five meetings a year and readings from his poems and tales, streamed world-wide on Zoom. We have a triannual Journal and a Library for members and researchers. We encourage children to read him, and write stories for themselves. We have a JiscMail email discussion group.

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Videos

[01] Rudyard Kipling Documentary - Biography of the life of Rudyard Kipling

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HcHCHOq7ZY [12:02]

Rudyard Kipling was born in India in 1865 and educated in England but returned to India in 1882. A decade later, Kipling married Caroline Balestier and settled in Brattleboro, Vermont, where he wrote The Jungle Book (1894), among a host of other works that made him hugely successful. Kipling was the recipient of the 1907 Nobel Prize in Literature. He died in 1936.

[02] The Tragic Life of Rudyard Kipling

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wd14NCctoBA [14:48]

The life of the youngest-ever winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, Rudyard Kipling, was filled with tragedy. He survived a difficult childhood to go on to become one of the most celebrated authors of his day, penning such classics as "The Jungle Book" and "Just So Stories". But, only one of his children would survive him and his legacy has been tied to some of his out-dated political beliefs. The History Guy remembers the tragic life of Rudyard Kipling.

[03] English Literature | Rudyard Kipling: life, works, style, main themes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-sTiUe9nZ0 [27:45]

Rudyard Kipling was a very prolific writer, who represented both the British imperialistic society and the Indian colony. In his works he experimented styles and contents. Amongst his masterpieces there are the Jungle Books and Just so Stories, but also Kim and many more novels, short stories and poems.

[04] If' by Rudyard Kipling | High Grade Analysis by an English Teacher

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oHKoutU0_k [29:20]

In this video, we delve deep into Rudyard Kipling's 'If', a staple of the Edexcel English Literature syllabus.

Aimed at helping you achieve the highest grades, this breakdown covers key themes, language techniques, and structural elements of the poem. Whether you're preparing for your exams or just looking to enhance your understanding, this video will provide you with the tools you need to excel.

[05] If by Rudyard Kipling - Poem Summary, Analysis, Interpretation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EqcuPh_5P0 [23:48]

[06] "If—" by Rudyard Kipling | The Poem That Turns Boys Into Men

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dVJ9uSrlok [30:27]

Here's my analysis of "If—" by Rudyard Kipling, the world's greatest poem on stoicism, alpha & sigma male mindset, and positive masculinity. The speaker of the poem is a father giving advice to his son about how to become a stoic man who is strong, disciplined, in control of his emotions, and able to conquer the world. I first read this poem while in high school, when I was being flooded with harmful narratives like "Men are trash, pigs, stupid," or any other negative descriptive word. "If—" showed me a different perspective, one that encouraged me to be the best man that I can be. I hope my analysis shows you why this poem changed my life as well as why it should be read by every young man.

[07] The Cat Who Walked by Himself, by Rudyard Kipling

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUzFYAOJbVs [30:37]

A wonderful story from Kipling's "Just So" children's story books - which were an amusing way of explaining how the various animals came to look and act the way that they do - and in this we find out how the cat became so independent, read by Dean Robert.

7 May 1861

7 Aug 1941

Rabindranath Tagore

Nobel Prize in Literature 1913

Born: 7 May 1861, Calcutta, India
Died: 7 August 1941, Calcutta, India
Residence at the time of the award: India
Prize motivation:
"because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West"

Language: Bengali; English
Prize share: 1/1
https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/tagore/facts/

Links to other sites

[01]On Rabindranath Tagore from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02]Selected Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore from Representative Poetry
[03]Online, University of Toronto Libraries

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Nominations

Discover who nominated this laureate for the Nobel Prize, and if the laureate nominated anyone else for the prize.

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/tagore/nominations/

Use the map to explore which countries the nominations came from, as well as finding out where the nominated person or organisation came from.

Nominated for the Nobel Prize in

- Literature 1913, by Thomas Sturge Moore

Submitted nominations for the Nobel Prize in

- Literature 1935, nominee: James Cousins

Explore a visualisation of the nominations
Search for nominees and nominators in the nomination archive

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Photo Gallery

See all photos

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/tagore/photo-gallery/

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Harald Hjärne,
Chairman of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy, on 10 Dec, 1913

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/ceremony-speech/}

In awarding the Nobel Prize in Literature to the Anglo-Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, the Academy has found itself in the happy position of being able to accord this recognition to an author who, in conformity with the express wording of Alfred Nobel's last will and testament, had during the current year, written the finest poems «of an idealistic tendency.» Moreover, after exhaustive and conscientious deliberation, having concluded that these poems of his most nearly approach the prescribed standard, the Academy thought that there was no reason to hesitate because the poet's name was still comparatively unknown in Europe, due to the distant location of his home. There was even less reason since the founder of the Prize laid it down in set terms as his «express wish and desire that, in the awarding of the Prize, no consideration should be paid to the nationality to which any proposed candidate might belong.»

Tagore's *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (1912), a collection of religious poems, was the one of his works that especially arrested the attention of the selecting critics. Since last year the book, in a real and full sense, has belonged to English literature, for the author himself, who by education and practice is a poet in his native Indian tongue, has bestowed upon the poems a new dress, alike perfect in form and personally original in inspiration. This has made them accessible to all in England, America, and the entire Western world for whom noble literature is of interest and moment. Quite independently of any knowledge of his Bengali poetry, irrespective, too, of differences of religious faiths, literary schools, or party aims, Tagore has been hailed from various quarters as a new and admirable master of that poetic art which has been a never-failing concomitant of the expansion of British civilization ever since the days of Queen Elizabeth. The features of this poetry that won immediate and enthusiastic admiration are the perfection with which the poet's own ideas and those he has borrowed have been harmonized into a complete whole; his rhythmically balanced style, that, to quote an English critic's opinion, «combines at once the feminine grace of poetry with the virile power of prose»; his austere, by some termed classic, taste in the choice of words and his use of the other elements of expression in a borrowed tongue – those features, in short, that stamp an original work as such, but which at the same time render more difficult its reproduction in another language.

The same estimate is true of the second cycle of poems that came before us, *The Gardener, Lyrics of Love and Life* (1913). In this work, however, as the author himself points out, he has recast rather than interpreted his earlier inspirations. Here we see another phase of his personality, now subject to the alternately blissful and torturing experiences of youthful love, now prey to the feelings of longing and joy that the vicissitudes of life give rise to, the whole interspersed nevertheless with glimpses of a higher world.

English translations of Tagore's prose stories have been published under the title *Glimpses of Bengal Life* (1913). Though the form of these tales does not bear his own stamp – the rendering being by another hand – their content gives evidence of his versatility and wide range of observation, of his heartfelt sympathy with the fates and experiences of differing types of men, and of his talent for plot construction and development.

Tagore has since published both a collection of poems, poetic pictures of childhood and home life, symbolically entitled *The Crescent Moon* (1913), and a number of lectures given before American and English university audiences, which in book form he calls *Sâdhanâ: The Realisation of Life* (1913). They embody his views of the ways in which man can arrive at a faith in the light of which it may be possible to live. This very seeking of his to discover the true relation between faith and thought makes Tagore stand out as a poet of rich endowment, characterized by his great profundity of thought, but most of all by his warmth of feeling and by the moving power of his figurative language. Seldom indeed in the realm of imaginative literature are attained so great a range and diversity of note and of colour, capable of expressing with equal harmony and grace the emotions of every mood from the longing of the soul after eternity to the joyous merriment prompted by the innocent child at play.

Concerning our understanding of this poetry, by no means exotic but truly universally human in character, the future will probably add to what we know now. We do know, however, that the poet's motivation extends to the effort of reconciling two spheres of civilization widely separated, which above all is the characteristic mark of our present epoch and constitutes its most important task and problem. The true inwardness of this work is most clearly and purely revealed in the efforts exerted in the Christian mission-field throughout the world. In times to come, historical inquirers will know better how to appraise its importance and influence, even in what is at present hidden from our gaze and where no or only grudging recognition is accorded. They will undoubtedly form a higher estimate of it than the one now deemed fitting in many quarters. Thanks to this movement, fresh, bubbling springs of living water have been tapped, from which poetry in particular may draw inspiration, even though those springs are perhaps intermingled with alien streams, and whether or not they be traced to their right source or their origin be attributed to the depths of the dreamworld. More especially, the preaching of the Christian religion has provided in many places the first definite impulse toward a revival and regeneration of the vernacular language, i.e., its liberation from the bondage of an artificial tradition, and consequently also toward a development of its capacity for nurturing and sustaining a vein of living and natural poetry.

The Christian mission has exercised its influence as a rejuvenating force in India, too, where in conjunction with religious revivals many of the vernaculars were early put to literary use, thereby acquiring status and stability. However, with only too regular frequency, they fossilized again under pressure from the new tradition that gradually established itself. But the influence of the Christian mission has extended far beyond the range of the actually registered proselytizing work. The struggle that the last century witnessed between the living vernaculars and the sacred language of ancient times for control over the new literatures springing into life would have had a very different course and outcome, had not the former found able support in the fostering care bestowed upon them by the self-sacrificing missionaries.

It was in Bengal, the oldest Anglo-Indian province and the scene many years before of the indefatigable labours of that missionary pioneer, Carey, to promote the Christian religion and to improve the vernacular language, that Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861. He was a scion of a respected family that had already given evidence of intellectual ability in many areas. The surroundings in which the boy and young man grew up were in no sense primitive or calculated to hem in his conceptions of the world and of life. On the contrary, in his home there prevailed, along with a highly cultivated appreciation of art, a profound reverence for the inquiring spirit and wisdom of the forefathers of the race, whose texts were used for family devotional worship. Around him, too, there was then coming into being a new literary spirit that consciously sought to reach forth to the people and to make itself acquainted with their life needs. This new spirit gained in force as reforms ere firmly effected by the Government, after the quelling of the widespread, confused Indian Mutiny.

Rabindranath's father was one of the leading and most zealous members of a religious community to which his son still belongs. That body, known by the name of «Brahmo Samaj», did not arise as a sect of the ancient Hindu type, with the purpose of spreading the worship of some particular godhead as superior to all others. Rather, it was founded in the early part of the nineteenth century by an enlightened and influential man who had been much impressed by the doctrines of Christianity, which he had studied also in England. He endeavoured to give to the native Hindu traditions, handed down from the past, an interpretation in agreement with what he conceived to be the spirit and import of the Christian faith. Doctrinal controversy has since been rife regarding the interpretation of truth that he and his successors were thus led to give, whereby the community has been subdivided into a number of independent sects. The character, too, of the community, appealing essentially to highly trained intellectual minds, has from its inception always precluded any large growth of the numbers of its avowed adherents. Nevertheless, the indirect influence exercised by the body, even upon the development of popular education and literature, is held to be very considerable indeed. Among those community members who have grown up in recent years, Rabindranath Tagore has laboured to a pre-eminent degree. To them he has stood as a revered master and prophet. That intimate interplay of teacher and pupil so earnestly sought after has attained a deep, hearty, and simple manifestation, both in religious life and in literary training.

To carry out his life's work Tagore equipped himself with a many-sided culture, European as well as Indian, extended and matured by travels abroad and by advanced study in London. In his youth he travelled widely in his own land, accompanying his father as far as the Himalayas. He was still quite young when he began to write in Bengali, and he has tried his hand in prose and poetry, lyrics and dramas. In addition to his descriptions of the life of he common people of his own country, he has dealt in separate works with questions in literary criticism, philosophy, and sociology. At one period, some time ago, there occurred a break in the busy round of his activities, for he then felt obliged, in accord with immemorial practice among his race, to pursue for a time a contemplative hermit life in a boat floating on the waters of a tributary of the sacred Ganges River. After he returned to ordinary life, his reputation among his own people as a man of refined wisdom and chastened piety grew greater from day to day. The open-air school which he established in western Bengal, beneath the sheltering branches of the mango tree, has brought up numbers of youths who as devoted disciples have spread his teaching throughout the land. To this place he has now retired, after spending nearly a year as an honoured guest in the literary circles of England and America and attending the Religious History Congress held in Paris last summer (1913).

Wherever Tagore has encountered minds open to receive his high teaching, the reception accorded him has been that suited to a bearer of good tidings which are delivered, in language intelligible to all, from that treasure house of the East whose existence had long been conjectured. His own attitude, moreover, is that he is but the intermediary, giving freely of that to which by birth he has access. He is not at all anxious to shine before men as a genius or as an inventor of some new thing. In

contrast to the cult of work, which is the product of life in the fenced-in cities of the Western world, with its fostering of a restless, contentious spirit; in contrast to its struggle to conquer nature for the love of gain and profit, «as if we are living», Tagore says, «in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything we want from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things» (*Sâdhanâ*, p. 5); in contrast to all that enervating hurry and scurry, he places before us the culture that in the vast, peaceful, and enshrining forests of India attains its perfection, a culture that seeks primarily the quiet peace of the soul in ever-increasing harmony with the life of nature herself It is a poetical, not a historical, picture that Tagore here reveals to us to confirm his promise that a peace awaits us, too. By virtue of the right associated with the gift of prophecy, he freely depicts the scenes that have loomed before his creative vision at a period contemporary with the beginning of time.

He is, however, as far removed as anyone in our midst from all that we are accustomed to hear dispensed and purveyed in the market places as Oriental philosophy, from painful dreams about the transmigration of souls and the impersonal *karma*, from the pantheistic, and in reality abstract, belief that is usually regarded as peculiarly characteristic of the higher civilization in India. Tagore himself is not even prepared to admit that a belief of that description can claim any authority from the profoundest utterances of the wise men of the past. He peruses his Vedic hymns, his *Upanishads*, and indeed the theses of Buddha himself, in such a manner that he discovers in them, what is for him an irrefutable truth. If he seeks the divinity in nature, he finds there a living personality with the features of omnipotence, the all-embracing lord of nature, whose preternatural spiritual power nevertheless likewise reveals its presence in all temporal life, small as well as great, but especially in the soul of man predestined for eternity. Praise, prayer, and fervent devotion pervade the song offerings that he lays at the feet of this nameless divinity of his. Ascetic and even ethic austerity would appear to be alien to his type of divinity worship, which may be characterized as a species of aesthetic theism. Piety of that description is in full concord with the whole of his poetry, and it has bestowed peace upon him. He proclaims the coming of that peace for weary and careworn souls even within the bounds of Christendom.

This is mysticism, if we like to call it so, but not a mysticism that, relinquishing personality, seeks to become absorbed in an All that approaches a Nothingness, but one that, with all the talents and faculties of the soul trained to their highest pitch, eagerly sets forth to meet the living Father of the whole creation. This more strenuous type of mysticism was not wholly unknown even in India before the days of Tagore, hardly indeed among the ascetics and philosophers of ancient times but rather in the many forms of *bhakti*, a piety whose very essence is the profound love of and reliance upon God. Ever since the Middle Ages, influenced in some measure by the Christian and other foreign religions, *bhakti* has sought the ideals of its faith in the different phases of Hinduism, varied in character but each to all intents monotheistic in conception. All those higher forms of faith have disappeared or have been depraved past recognition, choked by the superabundant growth of that mixture of cults that has attracted to its banner all those Indian peoples who lacked an adequate power of resistance to its blandishments. Even though Tagore may have borrowed one or another note from the orchestral symphonies of his native predecessors, yet he treads upon firmer ground in this age that draws the peoples of the earth closer together

along paths of peace, and of strife too, to joint and collective responsibilities, and that spends its own energies in dispatching greetings and good wishes far over land and sea. Tagore, though, in thought-impelling pictures, has shown us how all things temporal are swallowed up in the eternal:

> Time is endless in thy hands, my lord.
> There is none to count thy minutes.
> Days and nights pass and ages bloom and fade like flowers.
> Thou knowest how to wait.
> Thy centuries follow each other perfecting a small wild flower.
> We have no time to lose, and having no time, we must scramble for our chances. We are too poor to be late.
> And thus it is that time goes by, while I give it to every querulous man who claims it, and thine altar is empty of all offerings to the last.
> At the end of the day I hasten in fear lest thy gate be shut; but if I find that yet there is time.

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Banquet Speech

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https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/tagore/speech/

I beg to convey to the Swedish Academy my grateful appreciation of the breadth of understanding which has brought the distant near, and has made a stranger a brother.

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Article

Tagore and his India

by Amartya Sen*

This article was published on 28 August 2001.

Voice of Bengal

Rabindranath Tagore, who died in 1941 at the age of eighty, is a towering figure in the millennium-old literature of Bengal. Anyone who becomes familiar with this large and flourishing tradition will be impressed by the power of Tagore's presence in Bangladesh and in India. His poetry as well as his novels, short stories, and essays are very widely read, and the songs he composed reverberate around the eastern part of India and throughout Bangladesh.

In contrast, in the rest of the world, especially in Europe and America, the excitement that Tagore's writings created in the early years of the twentieth century has largely vanished. The enthusiasm with which his work was once greeted was quite remarkable. *Gitanjali,* a selection of his poetry for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, was published in English translation in London in March of that year, and had been reprinted ten times by November, when the award was announced. But he is not much read now in the West, and already by 1937, Graham Greene was able to say: "As for Rabindranath Tagore, I cannot believe that anyone but Mr. Yeats can still take his poems very seriously."

The mystic

The contrast between Tagore's commanding presence in Bengali literature and culture, and his near-total eclipse in the rest of the world, is perhaps less interesting than the distinction between the view of Tagore as a deeply relevant and many-sided contemporary thinker in Bangladesh and India, and his image in the West as a repetitive and remote spiritualist. Graham Greene had, in fact, gone on to explain that he associated Tagore "with what Chesterton calls 'the bright pebbly eyes' of the Theosophists." Certainly, an air of mysticism played some part in the "selling" of Rabindranath Tagore to the West by Yeats, Ezra Pound, and his other early champions. Even Anna Akhmatova, one of Tagore's few later admirers (who translated his poems into Russian in the mid-1960s), talks of "that mighty flow of poetry which takes its strength from Hinduism as from the Ganges, and is called Rabindranath Tagore."

An air of mysticism.

Confluence of cultures

Rabindranath did come from a Hindu family – one of the landed gentry who owned estates mostly in what is now Bangladesh. But whatever wisdom there might be in Akhmatova's invoking of Hinduism and the Ganges, it did not prevent the largely Muslim citizens of Bangladesh from having a deep sense of identity with Tagore and his ideas. Nor did it stop the newly independent Bangladesh from choosing one of Tagore's songs – the "Amar Sonar Bangla" which means "my golden Bengal" – as its national anthem. This must be very confusing to those who see the contemporary world as a "clash of civilizations" – with "the Muslim civilization," "the Hindu civilization," and "the Western civilization," each forcefully confronting the others. They would also be confused by Rabindranath Tagore's own description of his Bengali family as the product of "a confluence of three cultures: Hindu, Mohammedan, and British".1

Rabindranath's grandfather, Dwarkanath, was well known for his command of Arabic and Persian, and Rabindranath grew up in a family atmosphere in which a deep knowledge of Sanskrit and ancient Hindu texts was combined with an understanding of Islamic traditions as well as Persian literature. It is not so much that Rabindranath tried to produce – or had an interest in producing – a "synthesis" of the different religions (as the great Moghul emperor Akbar tried hard to achieve) as that his outlook was persistently non-sectarian, and his writings – some two hundred books – show the influence of different parts of the Indian cultural background as well as of the rest of the world. 2

Abode of peace

Most of his work was written at Santiniketan (Abode of Peace), the small town that grew around the school he founded in Bengal in 1901, and he not only conceived

there an imaginative and innovative system of education, but through his writings and his influence on students and teachers, he was able to use the school as a base from which he could take a major part in India's social, political, and cultural movements.

The profoundly original writer, whose elegant prose and magical poetry Bengali readers know well, is not the sermonizing spiritual guru admired – and then rejected – in London. Tagore was not only an immensely versatile poet; he was also a great short story writer, novelist, playwright, essayist, and composer of songs, as well as a talented painter whose pictures, with their mixture of representation and abstraction, are only now beginning to receive the acclaim that they have long deserved. His essays, moreover, ranged over literature, politics, culture, social change, religious beliefs, philosophical analysis, international relations, and much else. The coincidence of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence with the publication of a selection of Tagore's letters by Cambridge University Press 3, brought Tagore's ideas and reflections to the fore, which makes it important to examine what kind of leadership in thought and understanding he provided in the Indian subcontinent in the first half of this century.

Gandhi and Tagore

Since Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Gandhi were two leading Indian thinkers in the twentieth century, many commentators have tried to compare their ideas. On learning of Rabindranath's death, Jawaharlal Nehru, then incarcerated in a British jail in India, wrote in his prison diary for August 7, 1941:

"Gandhi and Tagore. Two types entirely different from each other, and yet both of them typical of India, both in the long line of India's great men … It is not so much because of any single virtue but because of the *tout ensemble,* that I felt that among the world's great men today Gandhi and Tagore were supreme as human beings. What good fortune for me to have come into close contact with them."

Romain Rolland was fascinated by the contrast between them, and when he completed his book on Gandhi, he wrote to an Indian academic, in March 1923: "I have finished my *Gandhi,* in which I pay tribute to your two great river-like souls, overflowing with divine spirit, Tagore and Gandhi." The following month, he recorded in his diary an account of some of the differences between Gandhi and Tagore written by Reverend C.F. Andrews, the English clergyman and public activist who was a close friend of both men (and whose important role in Gandhi's life in South Africa as well as India is well portrayed in Richard Attenborough's film Gandhi [1982]). Andrews described to Rolland a discussion between Tagore and Gandhi, at which he was present, on subjects that divided them:

"The first subject of discussion was idols; Gandhi defended them, believing the masses incapable of raising themselves immediately to abstract ideas. Tagore cannot bear to see the people eternally treated as a child. Gandhi quoted the great things achieved in Europe by the flag as an idol; Tagore found it easy to object, but Gandhi held his ground, contrasting European flags bearing eagles, etc., with his own, on which he

has put a spinning wheel. The second point of discussion was nationalism, which Gandhi defended. He said that one must go through nationalism to reach internationalism, in the same way that one must go through war to reach peace."[4]
Tagore greatly admired Gandhi but he had many disagreements with him on a variety of subjects, including nationalism, patriotism, the importance of cultural exchange, the role of rationality and of science, and the nature of economic and social development. These differences, I shall argue, have a clear and consistent pattern, with Tagore pressing for more room for reasoning, and for a less traditionalist view, a greater interest in the rest of the world, and more respect for science and for objectivity generally.

Rabindranath knew that he could not have given India the political leadership that Gandhi provided, and he was never stingy in his praise for what Gandhi did for the nation (it was, in fact, Tagore who popularized the term "Mahatma" – great soul – as a description of Gandhi). And yet each remained deeply critical of many things that the other stood for. That Mahatma Gandhi has received incomparably more attention outside India and also within much of India itself makes it important to understand "Tagore's side" of the Gandhi-Tagore debates.

In his prison diary, Nehru wrote: "Perhaps it is as well that [Tagore] died now and did not see the many horrors that are likely to descend in increasing measure on the world and on India. He had seen enough and he was infinitely sad and unhappy." Toward the end of his life, Tagore was indeed becoming discouraged about the state of India, especially as its normal burden of problems, such as hunger and poverty, was being supplemented by politically organized incitement to "communal" violence between Hindus and Muslims. This conflict would lead in 1947, six years after Tagore's death, to the widespread killing that took place during partition; but there was much gore already during his declining days. In December 1939, he wrote to his friend Leonard Elmhirst, the English philanthropist and social reformer who had worked closely with him on rural reconstruction in India (and who had gone on to found the Dartington Hall Trust in England and a progressive school at Dartington that explicitly invoked Rabindranath's educational ideals):[5]

"It does not need a defeatist to feel deeply anxious about the future of millions who, with all their innate culture and their peaceful traditions are being simultaneously subjected to hunger, disease, exploitations foreign and indigenous, and the seething discontents of communalism."

How would Tagore have viewed the India of today? Would he see progress there, or wasted opportunity, perhaps even a betrayal of its promise and conviction? And, on a wider subject, how would he react to the spread of cultural separatism in the contemporary world?

East and West

Given the vast range of his creative achievements, perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the image of Tagore in the West is its narrowness; he is recurrently viewed as "the great mystic from the East," an image with a putative message for the West, which some would welcome, others dislike, and still others find deeply boring. To a great extent this Tagore was the West's own creation, part of its tradition of message-seeking from the East, particularly from India, which – as Hegel put it – had "existed for millennia in the imagination of the Europeans."6 Friedrich Schlegel, Schelling, Herder, and Schopenhauer were only a few of the thinkers who followed the same pattern. They theorized, at first, that India was the source of superior wisdom. Schopenhauer at one stage even argued that the New Testament "must somehow be of Indian origin: this is attested by its completely Indian ethics, which transforms morals into asceticism, its pessimism, and its avatar," in "the person of Christ." But then they rejected their own theories with great vehemence, sometimes blaming India for not living up to their unfounded expectations.

We can imagine that Rabindranath's physical appearance – handsome, bearded, dressed in non-Western clothes – may, to some extent, have encouraged his being seen as a carrier of exotic wisdom. Yasunari Kawabata, the first Japanese Nobel Laureate in Literature, treasured memories from his middle-school days of "this sage-like poet":

His white hair flowed softly down both sides of his forehead; the tufts of hair under the temples also were long like two beards, and linking up with the hair on his cheeks, continued into his beard, so that he gave an impression, to the boy I was then, of some ancient Oriental wizard.7

That appearance would have been well-suited to the selling of Tagore in the West as a quintessentially mystical poet, and it could have made it somewhat easier to pigeonhole him. Commenting on Rabindranath's appearance, Frances Cornford told William Rothenstein, "I can now imagine a powerful and gentle Christ, which I never could before." Beatrice Webb, who did not like Tagore and resented what she took to be his "quite obvious dislike of all that the Webbs stand for" (there is, in fact, little evidence that Tagore had given much thought to this subject), said that he was "beautiful to look at" and that "his speech has the perfect intonation and slow chant-like moderation of the dramatic saint." Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats, among others, first led the chorus of adoration in the Western appreciation of Tagore, and then soon moved to neglect and even shrill criticism. The contrast between Yeats's praise of his work in 1912 ("These lyrics … display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long," "the work of a supreme culture") and his denunciation in 1935 ("Damn Tagore") arose partly from the inability of Tagore's many-sided writings to fit into the narrow box in which Yeats wanted to place – and keep – him. Certainly, Tagore did write a huge amount, and published ceaselessly, even in English (sometimes in indifferent English translation), but Yeats was also bothered, it is clear, by the difficulty of fitting Tagore's later writings into the image Yeats had presented to the West. Tagore, he had said, was the product of "a whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us," and yet "we have met our own image, … or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream."8

Yeats did not totally reject his early admiration (as Ezra Pound and several others did), and he included some of Tagore's early poems in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse,* which he edited in 1936. Yeats also had some favorable things to say about Tagore's prose writings. His censure of Tagore's later poems was reinforced by his dislike of Tagore's own English translations of his work ("Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English," Yeats explained), unlike the English version of *Gitanjali* which Yeats had himself helped to prepare. Poetry is, of course, notoriously difficult to translate, and anyone who knows Tagore's poems in their original Bengali cannot feel satisfied with any of the translations (made with or without Yeats's help). Even the translations of his prose works suffer, to some extent, from distortion. E.M. Forster noted, in a review of a translation of one of Tagore's great Bengali novels, *The Home and the World,* in 1919: "The theme is so beautiful," but the charms have "vanished in translation," or perhaps "in an experiment that has not quite come off."9 Tagore himself played a somewhat bemused part in the boom and bust of his English reputation. He accepted the extravagant praise with much surprise as well as pleasure, and then received denunciations with even greater surprise, and barely concealed pain. Tagore was sensitive to criticism, and was hurt by even the most far-fetched accusations, such as the charge that he was getting credit for the work of Yeats, who had "rewritten" Gitanjali. (This charge was made by a correspondent for The Times, Sir Valentine Chirol, whom E.M. Forster once described as "an old Anglo-Indian reactionary hack.") From time-to-time Tagore also protested the crudity of some of his overexcited advocates. He wrote to C.F. Andrews in 1920: "These people … are like drunkards who are afraid of their lucid intervals."

God and others

Yeats was not wrong to see a large religious element in Tagore's writings. He certainly had interesting and arresting things to say about life and death. Susan Owen, the mother of Wilfred Owen, wrote to Rabindranath in 1920, describing her last conversations with her son before he left for the war which would take his life. Wilfred said goodbye with "those wonderful words of yours – beginning at 'When I go from hence, let this be my parting word.'" When Wilfred's pocket notebook was returned to his mother, she found "these words written in his dear writing – with your name beneath."

The idea of a direct, joyful, and totally fearless relationship with God can be found in many of Tagore's religious writings, including the poems of *Gitanjali.* From India's diverse religious traditions he drew many ideas, both from ancient texts and from popular poetry. But "the bright pebbly eyes of the Theosophists" do not stare out of his verses. Despite the archaic language of the original translation of *Gitanjali,* which did not, I believe, help to preserve the simplicity of the original, its elementary humanity comes through more clearly than any complex and intense spirituality:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?
Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

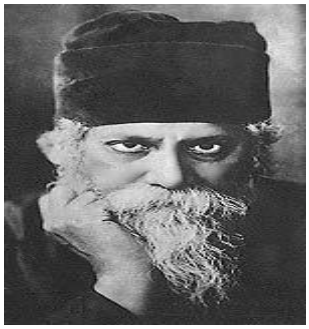
He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones.

He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust.
An ambiguity about religious experience is central to many of Tagore's devotional poems, and makes them appeal to readers irrespective of their beliefs; but excessively detailed interpretation can ruinously strip away that ambiguity.10 This applies particularly to his many poems which combine images of human love and those of pious devotion. Tagore writes:

> I have no sleep to-night. Ever and again I open my door and look out on the darkness, my friend!
> I can see nothing before me. I wonder where lies thy path!
> By what dim shore of the ink-black river, by what far edge of the frowning forest, through what mazy depth of gloom, art thou threading thy course to come to see me, my friend?

I suppose it could be helpful to be told, as Yeats hastens to explain, that "the servant or the bride awaiting the master's home-coming in the empty house" is "among the images of the heart turning to God." But in Yeats's considerate attempt to make sure that the reader does not miss the "main point," something of the enigmatic beauty of the Bengali poem is lost – even what had survived the antiquated language of the English translation. Tagore certainly had strongly held religious beliefs (of an unusually nondenominational kind), but he was interested in a great many other things as well and had many different things to say about them.

Some of the ideas he tried to present were directly political, and they figure rather prominently in his letters and lectures. He had practical, plainly expressed views about nationalism, war and peace, cross-cultural education, freedom of the mind, the importance of rational criticism, the need for openness, and so on. His admirers in the West, however, were tuned to the more otherworldly themes which had been emphasized by his first Western patrons. People came to his public lectures in Europe and America, expecting ruminations on grand, transcendental themes; when they heard instead his views on the way public leaders should behave, there was some resentment, particularly (as E.P. Thompson reports) when he delivered political criticism "at $700 a scold."



An ambiguity about religious experience.

Reasoning in freedom

For Tagore it was of the highest importance that people be able to live, and reason, in freedom. His attitudes toward politics and culture, nationalism and internationalism, tradition and modernity, can all be seen in the light of this belief.[11] Nothing, perhaps, expresses his values as clearly as a poem in *Gitanjali:*

> Where the mind is without fear
> and the head is held high;
> Where knowledge is free;
> Where the world has not been
> broken up into fragments
> by narrow domestic walls; …
> Where the clear stream of reason
> has not lost its way into the
> dreary desert sand of dead habit; …
> Into that heaven of freedom,
> my Father, let my country awake.

Rabindranath's qualified support for nationalist movements – and his opposition to the unfreedom of alien rule – came from this commitment. So did his reservations about patriotism, which, he argued, can limit both the freedom to engage ideas from outside "narrow domestic walls" and the freedom also to support the causes of people in other countries. Rabindranath's passion for freedom underlies his firm opposition to unreasoned traditionalism, which makes one a prisoner of the past (lost, as he put it, in "the dreary desert sand of dead habit").

Tagore illustrates the tyranny of the past in his amusing yet deeply serious parable "Kartar Bhoot" ("The Ghost of the Leader"). As the respected leader of an imaginary land is about to die, his panic-stricken followers request him to stay on after his death to instruct them on what to do. He consents. But his followers find their lives are full of rituals and constraints on everyday behavior and are not responsive to the world around them. Ultimately, they request the ghost of the leader to relieve them of his domination, when he informs them that he exists only in their minds.

Tagore's deep aversion to any commitment to the past that could not be modified by contemporary reason extended even to the alleged virtue of invariably keeping past promises. On one occasion when Mahatma Gandhi visited Tagore's school at Santiniketan, a young woman got him to sign her autograph book. Gandhi wrote: "Never make a promise in haste. Having once made it fulfill it at the cost of your life." When he saw this entry, Tagore became agitated. He wrote in the same book a short poem in Bengali to the effect that no one can be made "a prisoner forever with a chain

of clay." He went on to conclude in English, possibly so that Gandhi could read it too, "Fling away your promise if it is found to be wrong."12

Tagore and Gandhi, in Shantiniketan, 1940.

Tagore had the greatest admiration for Mahatma Gandhi as a person and as a political leader, but he was also highly skeptical of Gandhi's form of nationalism and his conservative instincts regarding the country's past traditions. He never criticized Gandhi personally. In the 1938 essay, "Gandhi the Man," he wrote:

Great as he is as a politician, as an organizer, as a leader of men, as a moral reformer, he is greater than all these as a man, because none of these aspects and activities limits his humanity. They are rather inspired and sustained by it. And yet there is a deep division between the two men. Tagore was explicit about his disagreement:

We who often glorify our tendency to ignore reason, installing in its place blind faith, valuing it as spiritual, are ever paying for its cost with the obscuration of our mind and destiny. I blamed Mahatmaji for exploiting this irrational force of credulity in our people, which might have had a quick result [in creating] a superstructure, while sapping the foundation. Thus began my estimate of Mahatmaji, as the guide of our nation, and it is fortunate for me that it did not end there.

But while it "did not end there," that difference of vision was a powerful divider. Tagore, for example, remained unconvinced of the merit of Gandhi's forceful advocacy that everyone should spin at home with the "charka," the primitive spinning wheel. For Gandhi this practice was an important part of India's self-realization. "The spinning-wheel gradually became," as his biographer B.R. Nanda writes, "the center of rural uplift in the Gandhian scheme of Indian economics."13 Tagore found the alleged economic rationale for this scheme quite unrealistic. As Romain Rolland noted, Rabindranath "never tires of criticizing the charka." In this economic judgment, Tagore was probably right. Except for the rather small specialized market for high-quality spun cloth, it is hard to make economic sense of hand-spinning, even with wheels less primitive than Gandhi's charka. Hand-spinning as a widespread activity can survive only with the help of heavy government subsidies.14 However, Gandhi's advocacy of the charka was not based only on economics. He wanted everyone to spin for "thirty minutes every day as a sacrifice," seeing this as a way for people who are better off

to identify themselves with the less fortunate. He was impatient with Tagore's refusal to grasp this point:

The poet lives for the morrow, and would have us do likewise …. "Why should I, who have no need to work for food, spin?" may be the question asked. Because I am eating what does not belong to me. I am living on the spoliation of my countrymen. Trace the source of every coin that finds its way into your pocket, and you will realise the truth of what I write. Every one must spin. Let Tagore spin like the others. Let him burn his foreign clothes; that is the duty today. God will take care of the morrow.15

If Tagore had missed something in Gandhi's argument, so did Gandhi miss the point of Tagore's main criticism. It was not only that the charka made little economic sense, but also, Tagore thought, that it was not the way to make people reflect on anything: "The charka does not require anyone to think; one simply turns the wheel of the antiquated invention endlessly, using the minimum of judgment and stamina."

Celibacy and personal life

Tagore and Gandhi's attitudes toward personal life were also quite different. Gandhi was keen on the virtues of celibacy, theorized about it, and, after some years of conjugal life, made a private commitment – publicly announced – to refrain from sleeping with his wife. Rabindranath's own attitude on this subject was very different, but he was gentle about their disagreements:

[Gandhiji] condemns sexual life as inconsistent with the moral progress of man, and has a horror of sex as great as that of the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata,* but, unlike Tolstoy, he betrays no abhorrence of the sex that tempts his kind. In fact, his tenderness for women is one of the noblest and most consistent traits of his character, and he counts among the women of his country some of his best and truest comrades in the great movement he is leading.

Tagore's personal life was, in many ways, an unhappy one. He married in 1883, lost his wife in 1902, and never remarried. He sought close companionship, which he did not always get (perhaps even during his married life – he wrote to his wife, Mrinalini: "If you and I could be comrades in all our work and in all our thoughts it would be splendid, but we cannot attain all that we desire"). He maintained a warm friendship with, and a strong Platonic attachment to, the literature-loving wife, Kadambari, of his elder brother, Jyotirindranath. He dedicated some poems to her before his marriage, and several books afterward, some after her death (she committed suicide, for reasons that are not fully understood, at the age of twenty-five, four months after Rabindranath's wedding). Much later in life, during his tour of Argentina in 1924-1925, Rabindranath came to know the talented and beautiful Victoria Ocampo, who later became the publisher of the literary magazine *Sur.* They became close friends, but it appears that Rabindranath deflected the possibility of a passionate relationship into a confined intellectual one.16 His friend Leonard Elmhirst, who accompanied Rabindranath on his Argentine tour, wrote:

Besides having a keen intellectual understanding of his books, she was in love with him – but instead of being content to build a friendship on the basis of intellect, she was in a hurry to establish that kind of proprietary right over him which he absolutely would not brook.

Ocampo and Elmhirst, while remaining friendly, were both quite rude in what they wrote about each other. Ocampo's book on Tagore (of which a Bengali translation was made from the Spanish by the distinguished poet and critic Shankha Ghosh) is primarily concerned with Tagore's writings but also discusses the pleasures and difficulties of their relationship, giving quite a different account from Elmhirst's, and never suggesting any sort of proprietary intentions.

Victoria Ocampo, however, makes it clear that she very much wanted to get physically closer to Rabindranath: "Little by little he [Tagore] partially tamed the young animal, by turns wild and docile, who did not sleep, dog-like, on the floor outside his door, simply because it was not done."17 Rabindranath, too, was clearly very much attracted to her. He called her "Vijaya" (the Sanskrit equivalent of Victoria), dedicated a book of poems to her, Purabi – an "evening melody," and expressed great admiration for her mind ("like a star that was distant"). In a letter to her he wrote, as if to explain his own reticence:

When we were together, we mostly played with words and tried to laugh away our best opportunities to see each other clearly … Whenever there is the least sign of the nest becoming a jealous rival of the sky [,] my mind, like a migrant bird, tries to take … flight to a distant shore.

Five years later, during Tagore's European tour in 1930, he sent her a cable: "Will you not come and see me." She did. But their relationship did not seem to go much beyond conversation, and their somewhat ambiguous correspondence continued over the years. Written in 1940, a year before his death at eighty, one of the poems in Sesh Lekha ("Last Writings"), seems to be about her: "How I wish I could once again find my way to that foreign land where waits for me the message of love!/… Her language I knew not, but what her eyes said will forever remain eloquent in its anguish."18 However indecisive, or confused, or awkward Rabindranath may have been, he certainly did not share Mahatma Gandhi's censorious views of sex. In fact, when it came to social policy, he advocated contraception and family planning while Gandhi preferred abstinence.

Tagore with his wife Mrinalini Devi in 1883.

Science and the people

Gandhi and Tagore severely clashed over their totally different attitudes toward science. In January 1934, Bihar was struck by a devastating earthquake, which killed thousands of people. Gandhi, who was then deeply involved in the fight against untouchability (the barbaric system inherited from India's divisive past, in which "lowly people" were kept at a physical distance), extracted a positive lesson from the tragic event. "A man like me," Gandhi argued, "cannot but believe this earthquake is a divine chastisement sent by God for our sins" – in particular the sins of untouchability. "For me there is a vital connection between the Bihar calamity and the untouchability campaign."

Tagore, who equally abhorred untouchability and had joined Gandhi in the movements against it, protested against this interpretation of an event that had caused suffering and death to so many innocent people, including children and babies. He also hated the epistemology implicit in seeing an earthquake as caused by ethical failure. "It is," he wrote, "all the more unfortunate because this kind of unscientific view of [natural] phenomena is too readily accepted by a large section of our countrymen."

The two remained deeply divided over their attitudes toward science. However, while Tagore believed that modern science was essential to the understanding of physical phenomena, his views on epistemology were interestingly heterodox. He did not take the simple "realist" position often associated with modern science. The report of his conversation with Einstein, published in The New York Times in 1930, shows how insistent Tagore was on interpreting truth through observation and reflective concepts. To assert that something is true or untrue in the absence of anyone to observe or perceive its truth, or to form a conception of what it is, appeared to Tagore to be deeply questionable. When Einstein remarked, "If there were no human beings any more, the Apollo Belvedere no longer would be beautiful?" Tagore simply replied, "No." Going further – and into much more interesting territory – Einstein said, "I agree with regard to this conception of beauty, but not with regard to truth." Tagore's response was: "Why not? Truth is realized through men."19

Albert Einstein and Tagore, in New York, 1930.

Tagore's epistemology, which he never pursued systematically, would seem to be searching for a line of reasoning that would later be elegantly developed by Hilary Putnam, who has argued: "Truth depends on conceptual schemes and it is nonetheless

'real truth.'"20 Tagore himself said little to explain his convictions, but it is important to take account of his heterodoxy, not only because his speculations were invariably interesting, but also because they illustrate how his support for any position, including his strong interest in science, was accompanied by critical scrutiny.

Nationalism and colonialism

Tagore was predictably hostile to communal sectarianism (such as a Hindu orthodoxy that was antagonistic to Islamic, Christian, or Sikh perspectives). But even nationalism seemed to him to be suspect. Isaiah Berlin summarizes well Tagore's complex position on Indian nationalism:

Tagore stood fast on the narrow causeway, and did not betray his vision of the difficult truth. He condemned romantic overattachment to the past, what he called the tying of India to the past "like a sacrificial goat tethered to a post," and he accused men who displayed it – they seemed to him reactionary – of not knowing what true political freedom was, pointing out that it is from English thinkers and English books that the very notion of political liberty was derived. But against cosmopolitanism he maintained that the English stood on their own feet, and so must Indians. In 1917 he once more denounced the danger of 'leaving everything to the unalterable will of the Master,' be he brahmin or Englishman.21

The duality Berlin points to is well reflected also in Tagore's attitude toward cultural diversity. He wanted Indians to learn what is going on elsewhere, how others lived, what they valued, and so on, while remaining interested and involved in their own culture and heritage. Indeed, in his educational writings the need for synthesis is strongly stressed. It can also be found in his advice to Indian students abroad. In 1907 he wrote to his son-in-law Nagendranath Gangulee, who had gone to America to study agriculture:

To get on familiar terms with the local people is a part of your education. To know only agriculture is not enough; you must know America too. Of course if, in the process of knowing America, one begins to lose one's identity and falls into the trap of becoming an Americanised person contemptuous of everything Indian, it is preferable to stay in a locked room.

Tagore was strongly involved in protest against the Raj on a number of occasions, most notably in the movement to resist the 1905 British proposal to split in two the province of Bengal, a plan that was eventually withdrawn following popular resistance. He was forthright in denouncing the brutality of British rule in India, never more so than after the Amritsar massacre of April 13, 1919, when 379 unarmed people at a peaceful meeting were gunned down by the army, and two thousand more were wounded. Between April 23 and 26, Rabindranath wrote five agitated letters to C.F. Andrews, who himself was extremely disturbed, especially after he was told by a British civil servant in India that thanks to this show of strength, the "moral prestige" of the Raj had "never been higher."

A month after the massacre, Tagore wrote to the Viceroy of India, asking to be relieved of the knighthood he had accepted four years earlier:

The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilized governments, barring some conspicuous exceptions, recent and remote. Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly efficient organisation for destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification … The universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers – possibly congratulating themselves for imparting what they imagine as salutary lessons … I for my part want to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who for their so-called insignificance are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings.

Both Gandhi and Nehru expressed their appreciation of the important part Tagore took in the national struggle. It is fitting that after independence, India chose a song of Tagore ("Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka," which can be roughly translated as "the leader of people's minds") as its national anthem. Since Bangladesh would later choose another song of Tagore ("Amar Sonar Bangla") as its national anthem, he may be the only one ever to have authored the national anthems of two different countries.

Tagore's criticism of the British administration of India was consistently strong and grew more intense over the years. This point is often missed, since he made a special effort to dissociate his criticism of the Raj from any denigration of British – or Western – people and culture. Mahatma Gandhi's well-known quip in reply to a question, asked in England, on what he thought of Western civilization ("It would be a good idea") could not have come from Tagore's lips. He would understand the provocations to which Gandhi was responding – involving cultural conceit as well as imperial tyranny. D.H. Lawrence supplied a fine example of the former: "I become more and more surprised to see how far higher, in reality, our European civilization stands than the East, Indian and Persian, ever dreamed of …. This fraud of looking up to them – this wretched worship-of-Tagore attitude is disgusting." But, unlike Gandhi, Tagore could not, even in jest, be dismissive of Western civilization.

Forthright in denouncing the brutality of British rule in India.

Even in his powerful indictment of British rule in India in 1941, in a lecture which he gave on his last birthday, and which was later published as a pamphlet under the title *Crisis in Civilization,* he strains hard to maintain the distinction between opposing Western imperialism and rejecting Western civilization. While he saw India as having been "smothered under the dead weight of British administration" (adding "another great and ancient civilization for whose recent tragic history the British cannot disclaim responsibility is China"), Tagore recalls what India has gained from "discussions centred upon Shakespeare's drama and Byron's poetry and above all … the large-hearted liberalism of nineteenth-century English politics." The tragedy, as Tagore saw it, came from the fact that what "was truly best in their own civilization, the upholding of dignity of human relationships, has no place in the British administration of this country." "If in its place they have established, baton in hand, a reign of 'law and order,' or in other words a policeman's rule, such a mockery of civilization can claim no respect from us."

Critique of patriotism

Rabindranath rebelled against the strongly nationalist form that the independence movement often took, and this made him refrain from taking a particularly active part in contemporary politics. He wanted to assert India's right to be independent without denying the importance of what India could learn – freely and profitably – from abroad. He was afraid that a rejection of the West in favor of an indigenous Indian tradition was not only limiting in itself; it could easily turn into hostility to other influences from abroad, including Christianity, which came to parts of India by the fourth century; Judaism, which came through Jewish immigration shortly after the fall of Jerusalem, as did Zoroastrianism through Parsi immigration later on (mainly in the eighth century), and, of course – and most importantly – Islam, which has had a very strong presence in India since the tenth century.

Tagore's criticism of patriotism is a persistent theme in his writings. As early as 1908, he put his position succinctly in a letter replying to the criticism of Abala Bose, the wife of a great Indian scientist, Jagadish Chandra Bose: "Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live." His novel *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World) has much to say about this theme. In the novel, Nikhil, who is keen on social reform, including women's liberation, but cool toward nationalism, gradually loses the esteem of his spirited wife, Bimala, because of his failure to be enthusiastic about anti-British agitations, which she sees as a lack of patriotic commitment. Bimala becomes fascinated with Nikhil's nationalist friend Sandip, who speaks brilliantly and acts with patriotic militancy, and she falls in love with him. Nikhil refuses to change his views: "I am willing to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it."22

As the story unfolds, Sandip becomes angry with some of his countrymen for their failure to join the struggle as readily as he thinks they should ("Some Mohamedan traders are still obdurate"). He arranges to deal with the recalcitrants by burning their meager trading stocks and physically attacking them. Bimala has to acknowledge the

connection between Sandip's rousing nationalistic sentiments and his sectarian – and ultimately violent-actions. The dramatic events that follow (Nikhil attempts to help the victims, risking his life) include the end of Bimala's political romance.

This is a difficult subject, and Satyajit Ray's beautiful film of *The Home and the World* brilliantly brings out the novel's tensions, along with the human affections and disaffections of the story. Not surprisingly, the story has had many detractors, not just among dedicated nationalists in India. Georg Lukács found Tagore's novel to be "a petit bourgeois yarn of the shoddiest kind," "at the intellectual service of the British police," and "a contemptible caricature of Gandhi." It would, of course, be absurd to think of Sandip as Gandhi, but the novel gives a "strong and gentle" warning, as Bertolt Brecht noted in his diary, of the corruptibility of nationalism, since it is not even-handed. Hatred of one group can lead to hatred of others, no matter how far such feeling may be from the minds of large-hearted nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi.

Admiration and criticism of Japan

Tagore's reaction to nationalism in Japan is particularly telling. As in the case of India, he saw the need to build the self-confidence of a defeated and humiliated people, of people left behind by developments elsewhere, as was the case in Japan before its emergence during the nineteenth century. At the beginning of one of his lectures in Japan in 1916 ("Nationalism in Japan"), he observed that "the worst form of bondage is the bondage of dejection, which keeps men hopelessly chained in loss of faith in themselves." Tagore shared the admiration for Japan widespread in Asia for demonstrating the ability of an Asian nation to rival the West in industrial development and economic progress. He noted with great satisfaction that Japan had "in giant strides left centuries of inaction behind, overtaking the present time in its foremost achievement." For other nations outside the West, he said, Japan "has broken the spell under which we lay in torpor for ages, taking it to be the normal condition of certain races living in certain geographical limits."

But then Tagore went on to criticize the rise of a strong nationalism in Japan, and its emergence as an imperialist nation. Tagore's outspoken criticisms did not please Japanese audiences and, as E.P. Thompson wrote, "the welcome given to him on his first arrival soon cooled."23 Twenty-two years later, in 1937, during the Japanese war on China, Tagore received a letter from Rash Behari Bose, an anti-British Indian revolutionary then living in Japan, who sought Tagore's approval for his efforts there on behalf of Indian independence, in which he had the support of the Japanese government. Tagore replied:

Your cable has caused me many restless hours, for it hurts me very much to have to ignore your appeal. I wish you had asked for my cooperation in a cause against which my spirit did not protest. I know, in making this appeal, you counted on my great regard for the Japanese for I, along with the rest of Asia, did once admire and look up to Japan and did once fondly hope that in Japan Asia had at last discovered its challenge to the West, that Japan's new strength would be consecrated in

safeguarding the culture of the East against alien interests. But Japan has not taken long to betray that rising hope and repudiate all that seemed significant in her wonderful, and, to us symbolic, awakening, and has now become itself a worse menace to the defenceless peoples of the East.

How to view Japan's position in the Second World War was a divisive issue in India. After the war, when Japanese political leaders were tried for war crimes, the sole dissenting voice among the judges came from the Indian judge, Radhabinod Pal, a distinguished jurist. Pal dissented on various grounds, among them that no fair trial was possible in view of the asymmetry of power between the victor and the defeated. Ambivalent feelings in India toward the Japanese military aggression, given the unacceptable nature of British imperialism, possibly had a part in predisposing Pal to consider a perspective different from that of the other judges.

More tellingly, Subhas Chandra Bose (no relation of Rash Behari Bose), a leading nationalist, made his way to Japan during the war via Italy and Germany after escaping from a British prison; he helped the Japanese to form units of Indian soldiers, who had earlier surrendered to the advancing Japanese army, to fight on the Japanese side as the "Indian National Army." Rabindranath had formerly entertained great admiration for Subhas Bose as a dedicated nonsectarian fighter for Indian independence.24 But their ways would have parted when Bose's political activities took this turn, although Tagore was dead by the time Bose reached Japan.
Tagore saw Japanese militarism as illustrating the way nationalism can mislead even a nation of great achievement and promise. In 1938 Yone Noguchi, the distinguished poet and friend of Tagore (as well as of Yeats and Pound), wrote to Tagore, pleading with him to change his mind about Japan. Rabindranath's reply, written on September 12, 1938, was altogether uncompromising:

It seems to me that it is futile for either of us to try to convince the other, since your faith in the infallible right of Japan to bully other Asiatic nations into line with your Government's policy is not shared by me …. Believe me, it is sorrow and shame, not anger, that prompt me to write to you. I suffer intensely not only because the reports of Chinese suffering batter against my heart, but because I can no longer point out with pride the example of a great Japan.

He would have been much happier with the postwar emergence of Japan as a peaceful power. Then, too, since he was not free of egotism, he would also have been pleased by the attention paid to his ideas by the novelist Yasunari Kawabata and others.25

Yasunari Kawabata

International concerns

Tagore was not invariably well-informed about international politics. He allowed himself to be entertained by Mussolini in a short visit to Italy in May-June 1926, a visit arranged by Carlo Formichi, professor of Sanskrit at the University of Rome. When he asked to meet Benedetto Croce, Formichi said, "Impossible! Impossible!" Mussolini told him that Croce was "not in Rome." When Tagore said he would go "wherever he is," Mussolini assured him that Croce's whereabouts were unknown.

Such incidents, as well as warnings from Romain Rolland and other friends, should have ended Tagore's flirtation with Mussolini more quickly than it did. But only after he received graphic accounts of the brutality of Italian fascism from two exiles, Gaetano Salvemini and Gaetano Salvadori, and learned more of what was happening in Italy, did he publicly denounce the regime, publishing a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* in August. The next month, Popolo d'Italia, the magazine edited by Benito Mussolini's brother, replied: "Who cares? Italy laughs at Tagore and those who brought this unctuous and insupportable fellow in our midst."

With his high expectations of Britain, Tagore continued to be surprised by what he took to be a lack of official sympathy for international victims of aggression. He returned to this theme in the lecture he gave on his last birthday, in 1941:

While Japan was quietly devouring North China, her act of wanton aggression was ignored as a minor incident by the veterans of British diplomacy. We have also witnessed from this distance how actively the British statesmen acquiesced in the destruction of the Spanish Republic.

But distinguishing between the British government and the British people, Rabindranath went on to note "with admiration how a band of valiant Englishmen laid down their lives for Spain."

Tagore's view of the Soviet Union has been a subject of much discussion. He was widely read in Russia. In 1917 several Russian translations of *Gitanjali* (one edited by Ivan Bunin, later the first Russian Nobel Laureate in Literature) were available, and by the late 1920s many of the English versions of his work had been rendered into Russian by several distinguished translators. Russian versions of his work continued to appear: Boris Pasternak translated him in the 1950s and 1960s.

When Tagore visited Russia in 1930, he was much impressed by its development efforts and by what he saw as a real commitment to eliminate poverty and economic inequality. But what impressed him most was the expansion of basic education across the old Russian empire. In Letters from Russia, written in Bengali and published in 1931, he unfavorably compares the acceptance of widespread illiteracy in India by the British administration with Russian efforts to expand education:

In stepping on the soil of Russia, the first thing that caught my eye was that in education, at any rate, the peasant and the working classes have made such enormous progress in these few years that nothing comparable has happened even to our highest classes in the course of the last hundred and fifty years …. The people here are not at all afraid of giving complete education even to Turcomans of distant Asia; on the contrary, they are utterly in earnest about it. [26]

When parts of the book were translated into English in 1934, the under-secretary for India stated in Parliament that it was "calculated by distortion of the facts to bring the British Administration in India into contempt and disrepute," and the book was then promptly banned. The English version would not be published until after independence.

Education and freedom

The British Indian administrators were not, however, alone in trying to suppress Tagore's reflections on Russia. They were joined by Soviet officials. In an interview with *Izvestia* in 1930, Tagore sharply criticized the lack of freedom that he observed in Russia:

I must ask you: Are you doing your ideal a service by arousing in the minds of those under your training anger, class-hatred, and revengefulness against those whom you consider to be your enemies? … Freedom of mind is needed for the reception of truth; terror hopelessly kills it …. For the sake of humanity I hope you may never create a vicious force of violence, which will go on weaving an interminable chain of violence and cruelty …. You have tried to destroy many of the other evils of [the czarist] period. Why not try to destroy this one also?

The interview was not published in *Izvestia* until 1988 – nearly sixty years later.[27] Tagore's reaction to the Russia of 1930 arose from two of his strongest commitments: his uncompromising belief in the importance of "freedom of mind" (the source of his criticism of the Soviet Union), and his conviction that the expansion of basic education is central to social progress (the source of his praise, particularly in contrast to British-run India). He identified the lack of basic education as the fundamental cause of many of India's social and economic afflictions:

In my view the imposing tower of misery which today rests on the heart of India has its sole foundation in the absence of education. Caste divisions, religious conflicts, aversion to work, precarious economic conditions – all centre on this single factor.

It was on education (and on the reflection, dialogue, and communication that are associated with it), rather than on, say, spinning "as a sacrifice" ("the charka does not require anyone to think"), that the future of India would depend.

Tagore was concerned not only that there be wider opportunities for education across the country (especially in rural areas where schools were few), but also that the schools themselves be more lively and enjoyable. He himself had dropped out of school early, largely out of boredom, and had never bothered to earn a diploma. He

wrote extensively on how schools should be made more attractive to boys and girls and thus more productive. His own co-educational school at Santiniketan had many progressive features. The emphasis here was on self-motivation rather than on discipline, and on fostering intellectual curiosity rather than competitive excellence.

Much of Rabindranath's life was spent in developing the school at Santiniketan. The school never had much money, since the fees were very low. His lecture honoraria, "$700 a scold," went to support it, as well as most of his Nobel Prize money. The school received no support from the government, but did get help from private citizens – even Mahatma Gandhi raised money for it.

The dispute with Mahatma Gandhi on the Bihar earthquake touched on a subject that was very important to Tagore: the need for education in science as well as in literature and the humanities. At Santiniketan, there were strong "local" elements in its emphasis on Indian traditions, including the classics, and in the use of Bengali rather than English as the language of instruction. At the same time there were courses on a great variety of cultures, and study programs devoted to China, Japan, and the Middle East. Many foreigners came to Santiniketan to study or teach, and the fusion of studies seemed to work.

I am partial to seeing Tagore as an educator, having myself been educated at Santiniketan. The school was unusual in many different ways, such as the oddity that classes, excepting those requiring a laboratory, were held outdoors (whenever the weather permitted). No matter what we thought of Rabindranath's belief that one gains from being in a natural setting while learning (some of us argued about this theory), we typically found the experience of outdoor schooling extremely attractive and pleasant. Academically, our school was not particularly exacting (often we did not have any examinations at all), and it could not, by the usual academic standards, compete with some of the better schools in Calcutta. But there was something remarkable about the ease with which class discussions could move from Indian traditional literature to contemporary as well as classical Western thought, and then to the culture of China or Japan or elsewhere. The school's celebration of variety was also in sharp contrast with the cultural conservatism and separatism that has tended to grip India from time to time.

The cultural give and take of Tagore's vision of the contemporary world has close parallels with the vision of Satyajit Ray, also an alumnus of Santiniketan who made several films based on Tagore's stories.28 Ray's words about Santiniketan in 1991 would have greatly pleased Rabindranath:

I consider the three years I spent in Santiniketan as the most fruitful of my life …. Santiniketan opened my eyes for the first time to the splendours of Indian and Far Eastern art. Until then I was completely under the sway of Western art, music and literature. Santiniketan made me the combined product of East and West that I am.29

India today

At the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence, the reckoning of what India had or had not achieved in this half century was a subject of considerable interest: "What has been the story of those first fifty years?" (as Shashi Tharoor asked in his balanced, informative, and highly readable account of *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*).30 If Tagore were to see the India of today, more than half a century after independence, nothing perhaps would shock him so much as the continued illiteracy of the masses. He would see this as a total betrayal of what the nationalist leaders had promised during the struggle for independence – a promise that had figured even in Nehru's rousing speech on the eve of independence in August 1947 (on India's "tryst with destiny").

In view of his interest in childhood education, Tagore would not be consoled by the extraordinary expansion of university education, in which India sends to its universities six times as many people per unit of population as does China. Rather, he would be stunned that, in contrast to East and Southeast Asia, including China, half the adult population and two thirds of Indian women remain unable to read or write. Statistically reliable surveys indicate that even in the late 1980s, nearly half of the rural girls between the ages of twelve and fourteen did not attend any school for a single day of their lives.31

This state of affairs is the result of the continuation of British imperial neglect of mass education, which has been reinforced by India's traditional elitism, as well as upper-class-dominated contemporary politics (except in parts of India such as Kerala, where anti-upper-caste movements have tended to concentrate on education as a great leveller). Tagore would see illiteracy and the neglect of education not only as the main source of India's continued social backwardness, but also as a great constraint that restricts the possibility and reach of economic development in India (as his writings on rural development forcefully make clear). Tagore would also have strongly felt the need for a greater commitment – and a greater sense of urgency – in removing endemic poverty.

At the same time, Tagore would undoubtedly find some satisfaction in the survival of democracy in India, in its relatively free press, and in general from the "freedom of mind" that post-independence Indian politics has, on the whole, managed to maintain. He would also be pleased by the fact noted by the historian E.P. Thompson (whose father Edward Thompson had written one of the first major biographies of Tagore:32 All the convergent influences of the world run through this society: Hindu, Moslem, Christian, secular; Stalinist, liberal, Maoist, democratic socialist, Gandhian. There is not a thought that is being thought in the West or East that is not active in some Indian mind.33

Tagore would have been happy also to see that the one governmental attempt to dispense generally with basic liberties and political and civil rights in India, in the 1970s, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (ironically, herself a former student at

Santiniketan) declared an "emergency," was overwhelmingly rejected by the Indian voters, leading to the precipitate fall of her government.

Rabindranath would also see that the changes in policy that have eliminated famine since independence had much to do with the freedom to be heard in a democratic India. In Tagore's play *Raja O Rani* ("The King and the Queen"), the sympathetic Queen eventually rebels against the callousness of state policy toward the hungry. She begins by inquiring about the ugly sounds outside the palace, only to be told that the noise is coming from "the coarse, clamorous crowd who howl unashamedly for food and disturb the sweet peace of the palace." The Viceregal office in India could have taken a similarly callous view of Indian famines, right up to the easily preventable Bengal famine of 1943, just before independence, which killed between two and three million people. But a government in a multi-party democracy, with elections and free newspapers, cannot any longer dismiss the noise from "the coarse, clamorous crowd."34

Fearless reasoning in freedom.

Unlike Gandhi, Rabindranath would not resent the development of modern industries in India, or the acceleration of technical progress, since he did not want India to be shackled to the turning of "the wheel of an antiquated invention." Tagore was concerned that people not be dominated by machines, but he was not opposed to making good use of modern technology. "The mastery over the machine," he wrote in *Crisis in Civilization,* "by which the British have consolidated their sovereignty over their vast empire, has been kept a sealed book, to which due access has been denied to this helpless country." Rabindranath had a deep interest in the environment – he was particularly concerned about deforestation and initiated a "festival of tree-planting" (vriksha-ropana) as early as 1928. He would want increased private and government commitments to environmentalism; but he would not derive from this position a general case against modern industry and technology.

On cultural separation

Rabindranath would be shocked by the growth of cultural separatism in India, as elsewhere. The "openness" that he valued so much is certainly under great strain right now – in many countries. Religious fundamentalism still has a relatively small following

in India; but various factions seem to be doing their best to increase their numbers. Certainly religious sectarianism has had much success in some parts of India (particularly in the west and the north). Tagore would see the expansion of religious sectarianism as being closely associated with an artificially separatist view of culture.

He would have strongly resisted defining India in specifically Hindu terms, rather than as a "confluence" of many cultures. Even after the partition of 1947, India is still the third- largest Muslim country in the world, with more Muslims than in Bangladesh, and nearly as many as in Pakistan. Only Indonesia has substantially more followers of Islam. Indeed, by pointing to the immense heterogeneousness of India's cultural background and its richly diverse history, Tagore had argued that the "idea of India" itself militated against a culturally separatist view – "against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others."

Tagore would also oppose the cultural nationalism that has recently been gaining some ground in India, along with an exaggerated fear of the influence of the West. He was uncompromising in his belief that human beings could absorb quite different cultures in constructive ways:

Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, wherever they might have their origin. I am proud of my humanity when I can acknowledge the poets and artists of other countries as my own. Let me feel with unalloyed gladness that all the great glories of man are mine. Therefore it hurts me deeply when the cry of rejection rings loud against the West in my country with the clamour that Western education can only injure us.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that Rabindranath was not short of pride in India's own heritage, and often spoke about it. He lectured at Oxford, with evident satisfaction, on the importance of India's religious ideas – quoting both from ancient texts and from popular poetry (such as the verses of the sixteenth-century Muslim poet Kabir). In 1940, when he was given an honorary doctorate by Oxford University, in a ceremony arranged at his own educational establishment in Santiniketan ("In Gangem Defluit Isis," Oxford helpfully explained), to the predictable "volley of Latin" Tagore responded "by a volley of Sanskrit," as Marjorie Sykes, a Quaker friend of Rabindranath, reports. Her cheerful summary of the match, "India held its own," was not out of line with Tagore's pride in Indian culture. His welcoming attitude to Western civilization was reinforced by this confidence: he did not see India's culture as fragile and in need of "protection" from Western influence.

In India, he wrote, "circumstances almost compel us to learn English, and this lucky accident has given us the opportunity of access into the richest of all poetical literatures of the world." There seems to me much force in Rabindranath's argument for clearly distinguishing between the injustice of a serious asymmetry of power (colonialism being a prime example of this) and the importance nevertheless of

appraising Western culture in an open-minded way, in colonial and postcolonial territories, in order to see what uses could be made of it.

Rabindranath insisted on open debate on every issue, and distrusted conclusions based on a mechanical formula, no matter how attractive that formula might seem in isolation (such as "This was forced on us by our colonial masters – we must reject it," "This is our tradition – we must follow it," "We have promised to do this – we must fulfill that promise," and so on). The question he persistently asks is whether we have reason enough to want what is being proposed, taking everything into account. Important as history is, reasoning has to go beyond the past. It is in the sovereignty of reasoning – fearless reasoning in freedom – that we can find Rabindranath Tagore's lasting voice.35

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1. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* (London: Unwin, 1931, 2nd edition, 1961), p. 105. The extensive interactions between Hindu and Muslim parts of Indian culture (in religious beliefs, civic codes, painting, sculpture, literature, music, and astronomy) have been discussed by Kshiti Mohan Sen in *Bharate Hindu Mushalmaner Jukto Sadhana* (in Bengali) (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1949, extended edition, 1990) and Hinduism (Penguin, 1960).
2. Rabindranath's father Debendranath had in fact, joined the reformist religious group, the Brahmo Samaj, which rejected many contemporary Hindu practices as aberrations from the ancient Hindu texts.
3. *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, edited by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (Cambridge University Press, 1997). This essay draws on my Foreword to this collection. For important background material on Rabindranath Tagore and his reception in the West, see also the editors' *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (St. Martin's Press, 1995), and Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology (Picador, 1997).
4. See *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence,* with a Foreword by Jawaharlal Nehru (New Delhi: Government of India, 1976), pp.12-13.
5. On Dartington Hall, the school, and the Elmhirsts, see Michael Young, >*The Elmhirsts of Dartington: The Creation of an Utopian Community* (Routledge, 1982).
6. I have tried to analyze these "exotic" approaches to India (along with other Western approaches) in "India and the West," *The New Republic,* June 7, 1993, and in "Indian Traditions and the Western Imagination," *Daedalus,* Spring 1997.
7. *Yasunari Kawabata, The Existence and Discovery of Beauty,* translated by V.H. Viglielmo (Tokyo: The Mainichi Newspapers, 1969), pp. 56-57.
8. W.B. Yeats, "Introduction," in Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali* (London: Macmillan, 1913).
9 Tagore himself vacillated over the years about the merits of his own translations. He told his friend Sir William Rothenstein, the artist: "I am sure you remember with what reluctant hesitation I gave up to your hand my manuscript of *Gitanjali,* feeling sure that my English was of that amorphous kind for whose syntax a school-boy could be reprimanded." These – and related – issues are discussed by Nabaneeta Dev Sen, "The 'Foreign Reincarnation' of Rabindranath Tagore," *Journal of Asian Studies,* 25 (1966),

reprinted, along with other relevant papers, in her Counterpoints: *Essays in Comparative Literature* (Calcutta: Prajna, 1985).

10. The importance of ambiguity and incomplete description in Tagore's poetry provides some insight into the striking thesis of William Radice (one of the major English translators of Tagore) that "his blend of poetry and prose is all the more truthful for being incomplete" ("Introduction" to his *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories,* Penguin, 1991, p. 28).

11. Satyajit Ray, the film director, has argued that even in Tagore's paintings, "the mood evoked ... is one of a joyous freedom" (Ray, "Foreword," in Andrew Robinson, *The Art of Rabindranath Tagore,* London: André Deutsch, 1989).

12. Reported in Amita Sen, *Anando Sharbokaje* (in Bengali) (Calcutta: Tagore Research Institute, 2nd edition, 1996), p. 132.

13. B.R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford University Press, 1958; paperback, 1989), p. 149.

14. The economic issues are discussed in my *Choice of Techniques* (Blackwell, 1960), Appendix D.

15. Mohandas Gandhi, quoted by Krishna Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1961, 2nd edition, 1971), pp. 171-172.

16. For fuller accounts of the events, see Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*, Chapter 25, and Ketaki Kushari Dyson, *In Your Blossoming Flower-Garden: Rabindranath Tagore and Victoria Ocampo* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988).

17. Published in English translation in *Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume, 1861-1961* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1961), with an Introduction by Jawaharlal Nehru.

18. English translation from Krishna Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life*, p. 185.

19. "Einstein and Tagore Plumb the Truth," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 10, 1930; republished in Dutta and Robinson, *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore.*

20. Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism* (Open Court, 1987). On related issues, see also Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

21. Isaiah Berlin, "Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality," *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), p. 265.

22. Martha Nussbaum initiates her wide-ranging critique of patriotism (in a debate that is joined by many others) by quoting this passage from *The Home and the World* (in Martha C. Nussbaum et al., *For Love of Country,* edited by Joshua Cohen, Beacon Press, 1996, pp. 3-4).

23. E.P. Thompson, Introduction, to *Tagore's Nationalism* (London, Macmillan, 1991), p. 10.

24. For a lucid and informative analysis of the role of Subhas Chandra Bose and his brother Sarat in Indian politics, see Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalists Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose* (Columbia University Press, 1990).

25. Kawabata made considerable use of Tagore's ideas, and even built on Tagore's thesis that it "is easier for a stranger to know what it is in [Japan] which is truly valuable for all mankind" (The Existence and Discovery of Beauty, pp. 55-58).

26. Tagore, *Letters from Russia,* translated from Bengali by Sasadhar Sinha (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1960), p. 108.

27. It was, however, published in the *Manchester Guardian* shortly after it was meant to be published in the *Izvestia.* On this, see: Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man,* p. 297.

28. Satyajit Ray, *Our Films, Their Films* (Calcutta: Disha Book/Orient Longman, third edition, 1993). I have tried to discuss these issues in my Satyajit Ray Memorial Lecture, "Our Culture, Their Culture," The New Republic, April 1, 1996.
29. *The Guardian,* August 1, 1991.
30. *Arcade Publishing,* 1997, p. 1.
31. On this and related issues, see Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1996), particularly Chapter 6, and also Drèze and Sen, editors, *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives* (Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1996).
32. Edward Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist* (Oxford University Press, 1926).
33. Quoted in Shashi Tharoor, *India,* p. 9.
34. I have tried to discuss the linkage between democracy, political incentives, and prevention of disasters in *Resources, Values and Development* (Harvard University Press, 1984, reprinted 1997), Chapter 19, and in my presidential address to the American Economic Association, "Rationality and Social Choice," American Economic Review, 85 (1995).
35. For helpful discussions I am most grateful to Akeel Bilgrami, Sissela Bok (Harvard Professor; the daughter of Gunnar Myrdal, recipient of The Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 1974, and Alva Myrdal, who was awarded The Nobel Peace Prize in 1982), Sugata Bose, Supratik Bose, Krishna Dutta, Rounaq Jahan, Salim Jahan, Marufi Khan, Andrew Robinson, Nandana Sen, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Shashi Tharoor.

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Unique Features

Awards and prizes

- Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize
- Tagore Award
- Rabindra Puraskar
- Tagore Ratna and Tagore Puraskar

Festivals

- Rabindra Jayanti
- Tagore International Literature and Arts Festival

Universities and institutes

- Rabindranath Tagore University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India.
- Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, India.
- Rabindranath Tagore Medical College
- Rabindranath Tagore International Institute of Cardiac Sciences, Kolkata, India
- Rabindra University, Sahjadpur, Shirajganj, Bangladesh.
- Rabindranath Tagore University, Hojai, Assam, India

- Rabindra Maitree University, Courtpara, Kushtia, Bangladesh.[6]
- Rabindra Srijonkala University, Keraniganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- Rabindranath Thakur Mahavidyalaya, Tripura, India
- Rabindra Mahavidyalaya
- Tagore Government College of Education
- Tagore International School
- West Bengal Council of Rabindra Open Schooling
- Dum Dum Motijheel Rabindra Mahavidyalaya
- Rathindra Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Visva Bharati
- Rabindranath Tagore Secondary School, Mauritius
- Tagore Baal Niketan Sr. Sec. School, Karnal
- Tagore Vidyaniketan, Taliparamba

Buildings

- Tagore Theatre
- Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Auditorium, Sri Lanka
- Rabindra Parishad
- Rabindra Tirtha
- Rabindranath Tagore Academic Building, Rajshahi University, Bangladesh
- Bishwakabi Rabindranath Tagore Hall, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh
- Rabindra Nazrul Art Building, Arts Faculty, Islamic University, Bangladesh
- Rabindra Library (Central), Assam University, India
- Ravindra Bharathi, Hyderabad
- Ravindra Kalakshetra, Bangalore
- Rabindra Sadan, Kolkata
- Rabindra Mandap Auditorium, Bhubaneswar

Road and Street

- Rabindra Saroni in Kolkata
- Rabindranath Road in Jashore
- Rabindra Sarani in Dhaka
- Rehov Tagore in Tel-Aviv[11]
- Rabindranath Tagore Street in Ankara

Bridge

- Rabindra Setu, Kolkata

Places

- Rabindra Sarobar
- Rabindra Sarobor, Dhanmandi Lake, Dhaka
- Tagore Hill
- Tagore Garden metro station
- Tagoretown
- R. T. Nagar

- Thakurova, Prague
- Rue Tagore in 13th Arondissement, Paris lining Jardin Juan Miro and a bust inside it
- ul. Rabindrnatha Tagore, Warsaw, in Łódź, located near Juliusz Słowacki Park and the Lwowskich Lotników Roundabout and a street in the Mokotów district of Warsaw, Poland.
- Rabindranath Tagore Beach, Karwar, Karnataka

Museums

- Rabindra Bharati Museum, at Jorasanko Thakur Bari, Kolkata, India
- Tagore Memorial Museum, at Shilaidaha Kuthibadi, Shilaidaha, Bangladesh
- Rabindra Memorial Museum at Shahzadpur Kachharibari, Shahzadpur, Bangladesh
- Rabindra Bhavan Museum, in Santiniketan, India
- Rabindra Museum, in Mungpoo, near Kalimpong, India
- Patisar Rabindra Kacharibari, Patisar, Atrai, Naogaon, Bangladesh
- Pithavoge Rabindra Memorial Complex, Pithavoge, Rupsha, Khulna, Bangladesh
- Rabindra Complex, Dakkhindihi village, Phultala Upazila, Khulna, Bangladesh

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Tagore Award

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tagore_Award

The **Tagore Award** is an award given in commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) for cultural harmony. Established in 2011 by Government of India, it is given for outstanding achievement in fostering harmony and universalism and values of cultural harmony especially in conflict or extreme situations through innovative systems/strategies and which have an enduring and transformational impact. This award carries an amount of Rupees One Crore (ten million rupees, convertible to foreign currency), a Citation in a Scroll, a Plaque as well as an exquisite traditional handicraft/handloom item. The first award was given in 2012 to Pandit Ravi Shankar by the President of India Pranab Mukherjee. Ravi Shankar died before he could receive the award which was received by his wife Sukanya Shankar.

Music conductor Zubin Mehta received the Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony for the year 2013 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to cultural harmony. On 6 September 2013, President of India Pranab Mukherjee conferred the Tagore Award 2013 to Zubin Mehta at a ceremony held at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi.

Videos

[01] Rabindranath Tagore – Mystic Poet, Literary Genius & Nobel Laureate
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8HLIF32clU [28:41]
[02] Biography of Rabindranath Tagore: first Indian who won Nobel Prize in Literature
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kN7Y77pjz6c [25:55]
[03] Rabindranath Tagore, Indian Writer | English Literature | RABINDRANATH TAGORE
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBaKLNGrFX0 [40:44]
[04] Biography of Rabindranath Tagore (Life and Works)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmJ-ZKk7RSQ [53:25]
[05] Rabindranath Tagore - A Film by Satyajit Ray
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VsiBNepmp0 [51:24]
[06] Mrinaler Chithi | Story by Rabindranath Tagore | Classics
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q57MNtXqDpk [1:40:51]
[07] Rabindranath Tagore: The Global Legacy of a Literary Giant
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5etdmGCcEBE [26:07]

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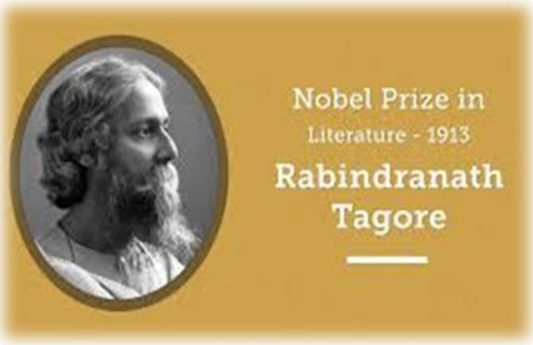

RABINDRANATH TAGORE
7 May 1861 – 7 August 1941
Bengali polymath who reshaped Bengali literature & music, as well as Indian art.
Prolific composer with 2,230 songs to his credit. His songs are known as RABINDRASANGIT.
First non-European to win the NOBEL PRIZE in Literature in 1913.
He is the ONLY PERSON in history to author national anthems of two nations India & Bangladesh.
"The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life
The lyrics and music for th original song of Sri Lanka's National Anthem were

13 Jun 1865

28 Jan 1939

William Butler Yeats

Nobel Prize in Literature 1923

Born: 13 June 1865, Dublin, Ireland
Died: 28 January 1939, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, France
Residence at the time of the award: Ireland
Prize motivation:
"for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation"
Language: English
Prize share: 1/1

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1923/yeats/facts/

Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1902, by William Lecky
- Literature 1914, by George Plunkett
- Literature 1915, by Per Hallström
- Literature 1918, by Per Hallström
- Literature 1921, by Erik Axel Karlfeldt
- Literature 1922, by Nobel Committee
- Literature 1923, by Nobel Committee

Photo Gallery

See all photos

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1923/yeats/photo-gallery/

Links to other sites

[01] On William Butler Yeats from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] On William Butler Yeats from Poetry Foundation
[03] On W. B. Yeats from Academy of American Poets

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Per Hallström,
Chairman of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy, on December 10, 1923

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1923/ceremony-speech/}

Very early, in the first bloom of youth, William Butler Yeats emerged as a poet with an indisputable right to the name; his autobiography shows that the inner promptings of the poet determined his relations to the world even when he was a mere boy. He has developed organically in the direction indicated by his emotional and intellectual life from the very beginning.

He was born in an artistic home – in Dublin – thus beauty naturally became a vital necessity for him. He showed artistic powers, and his education was devoted to the satisfying of this tendency; little effort was made to secure traditional schooling. He was educated for the most part in England, his second fatherland; nonetheless his decisive development was linked to Ireland, chiefly to the comparatively unspoiled Celtic district of Connaught where his family had their summer home. There he inhaled the imaginative mysticism of popular belief and popular stories which is the most distinctive feature of his people, and amidst a primitive nature of mountain and sea he became absorbed in a passionate endeavour to capture its very soul.

The soul of nature was to him no empty phrase, for Celtic pantheism, the belief in the existence of living, personal powers behind the world of phenomena, which most of the people had retained, seized hold of Yeats's imagination and fed his innate and strong religious needs. When he came nearest to the scientific spirit of his time, in zealous observations of the life of nature, he characteristically concentrated on the sequence of various bird notes at daybreak and the flight of moths as the stars of twilight were kindled. The boy got so far in his intimacy with the rhythm of the solar day that he could determine the time quite exactly by such natural signs. From this

intimate communion with the sounds of morning and nighttime, his poetry later received many of its most captivating traits.

He abandoned his training in the fine arts soon after he had grown up in order to devote himself to poetry, for which his inclination was strongest. But this training is evident throughout his whole career, both in the intensity with which he worships form and personal style and, still more, in the paradoxically audacious solution of problems in which his acute but fragmentary philosophical speculation sought its way to what he needed for his own peculiar nature.

The literary world he entered, when he settled down in London at the end of the eighties, did not offer him much positively, but it at least offered him fellowship in opposition, which to pugnacious youth seems particularly dear. It was filled with weariness and rebellion toward the spirit of the times which had prevailed just before, namely that of dogmatic natural science and naturalistic art. There were few whose hostility was so deeply grounded as that of Yeats, altogether intuitive, visionary, and indomitably spiritualistic as he was.

He was disturbed not only by the cocksureness of natural science and the narrowness of reality-aping art; even more, he was horrified by the dissolution of personality and the frigidity which issued from scepticism, by the desiccation of imagination and emotional life in a world which at best had faith only in a collective and automatic progression to the sacred land of Cockaigne. Events proved him to be terribly right: the «paradise» which could be reached by humanity with such schooling, we have now the dubious advantage of enjoying.

Even more beautiful kinds of social utopianism, represented by the greatly admired poet William Morris, did not captivate such an individualist as young Yeats. Later he found his way to the people, and then not as an abstract conception, but as the Irish people, to whom he had been close as a child. What he sought in that people was not the masses stirred by present day demands, but an historically developed soul which he wished to arouse to more conscious life.

In the intellectual unrest of London, things nationally Irish remained dear to Yeats's heart; this feeling was nurtured by summer visits to his homeland and by comprehensive studies of its folklore and customs. His earlier lyrics are almost exclusively built on his impressions from these. His early poems immediately won high esteem in England because the new material, with its strong appeal to the imagination, received a form which, despite its special characteristics, was nevertheless linked closely with several of the noblest traditions of English poetry. The blending together of Celtic and English, which had never been successfully affected in the political sphere, became a reality here in the world of poetic imagination – a symptom of no small spiritual significance.

However much Yeats had read of English masters, his verse has a new character. The cadence and the colours have changed, as if they had been moved to another air – that of the Celtic twilight by the sea. There is a greater element of song than is usual in modern English poetry. The music is more melancholy, and, under the gentle rhythm, which for all its freedom moves as securely as a sleepwalker, we have a hint of yet another rhythm with the slow breathing of the wind and the eternal pulse of the powers of nature. When this art reaches its highest level, it is absolutely magical, but it is seldom easy to grasp. It is indeed often so obscure that an effort is needed to understand it. This obscurity lies partly in the mysticism of the actual subject, but perhaps just as much in the Celtic temperament, which seems to be more distinguished by fire, delicacy, and penetration than by clearness. But no small part may have been played by the tendencies of the time: symbolism and *l'art pour l'art*, chiefly absorbed by the task of finding the boldly appropriate word.

Yeats's association with the life of a people saved him from the barrenness which attended so much of the effort for beauty that marked his age. Around him as the central point and leader arose, within a group of his countrymen in the literary world of London, that mighty movement which has been named the Celtic Revival and which created a new national literature, an Anglo-Irish literature.

The foremost and most versatile poet of this group was Yeats. His rousing and rallying personality caused the movement to grow and flower very quickly, by giving a common aim to hitherto scattered forces or by encouraging new forces previously unconscious of their existence.

Then, too, the Irish Theatre came into existence. Yeats's active propaganda created both a stage and a public, and the first performance was given with his drama *The Countess Cathleen* (1892). This work, extraordinarily rich in poetry was followed by a series of poetic dramas. all on Irish subjects drawn mainly from the old heroic sagas. The most beautiful among these are *Deirdre* (1907), the fateful tragedy of the Irish Helen; *The Green Helmet* (1910), a merrily heroic myth of a peculiarly primitive wildness; and above all *The King's Threshold* (1904), where the simple material has been permeated by thought of a rare grandeur and depth. The quarrel about the place and rank of the bard at the king's court here gives rise to the ever-burning question as to how much spiritual things are to hold good in our world, and whether they are to be received with true or false faith. With the claims on which the hero stakes his life, he defends in the supremacy of poetry all that makes the life of man beautiful and worthy. It would not become all poets to put forward such claims, but Yeats could do so: his idealism has never been dulled, nor has the severity of his art. In these dramatic pieces his verse attains a rare beauty and sureness of style.

Most enchanting, however, is his art in *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), which has all the magic of fairy poetry and all the freshness of spring, in its clear but as it were dreamy melody. Dramatically, also, this work is one of his finest; and it might be called the flower of his poetry, had he not also written the little prose drama *Cathleen ni*

Hoolihan (1902), which is at once his simplest folk play and his most classically perfect work.

Here more powerfully than anywhere else he touches the patriotic string. The subject is Ireland's struggle for liberty throughout the ages, and the chief personage is Ireland herself, impersonated by a wandering beggar woman. But we hear no simple tone of hatred, and the profound pathos of the piece is more restrained than in any other comparable poem. We hear only the purest and highest part of the nation's feeling; the words are few and the action the simplest possible. The whole thing is greatness without a touch of affectation. The subject, having come to Yeats in a dream, has retained its visionary stamp of being a gift from above-a conception not foreign to Yeats's aesthetic philosophy.

Much more might be said of Yeats's work, but it must suffice to mention the ways followed by his dramas of recent years. They have often been romantic by virtue of their strange and uncommon material, but they have generally striven after classic simplicity of form. This classicism has been gradually developed into bold archaism; the poet has sought to attain the primitive plasticity found in the beginning of all dramatic art. He has devoted much intensive, acute thought to the task of emancipating himself from the modern stage, with its scenery that disturbs the picture called up by the imagination, with its plays whose features are necessarily exaggerated by the footlights, with its audience's demand for realistic illusion. Yeats wishes to bring out the poem as it was born in the poet's vision; he has given form to this vision following Greek and Japanese models. Thus, he has revived the use of masks and has found a great place for the actors' gestures to the accompaniment of simple music.

In the pieces thus simplified and brought to a strict stylistic unity, whose subjects are still taken by preference from the hero legends of Ireland, he has sometimes attained a fascinating effect, even for the mere reader, both in the highly compressed dialogue and in the choruses with their deep lyrical tone. All this, however, is in its period of growth, and it is not yet possible to decide whether the sacrifices made are fully compensated for by what has been gained. These pieces, though in themselves highly noteworthy, will probably find greater difficulty in becoming popular than the earlier ones.

In these plays as well as in his clearest and most beautiful lyrics, Yeats has achieved what few poets have been able to do: he has succeeded in preserving contact with his people while upholding the most aristocratic artistry. His poetical work has arisen in an exclusively artistic milieu which has had many perils; but without abjuring the articles of his aesthetic faith, his burning and questing personality, ever aiming at the ideal, has contrived to keep itself free from aesthetic emptiness. He has been able to follow the spirit that early appointed him the interpreter of his country, a country that had long waited for someone to bestow on it a voice. It is not too much to call such a life's work great.

Nobel Prize Lecture

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1923/yeats/lecture/}

Nobel Lecture*, December 15, 1923

The Irish Dramatic Movement

I have chosen as my theme the Irish Dramatic Movement because when I remember the great honour that you have conferred upon me, I cannot forget many known and unknown persons. Perhaps the English committees would never have sent you my name if I had written no plays, no dramatic criticism, if my Iyric poetry had not a quality of speech practised upon the stage, perhaps even – though this could be no portion of their deliberate thought – if it were not in some degree the symbol of a movement. I wish to tell the Royal Academy of Sweden of the labours, triumphs, and troubles of my fellow workers.

The modern literature of Ireland, and indeed all that stir of thought which prepared for the Anglo-Irish War, began when Parnell fell from power in 1891. A disillusioned and embittered Ireland turned away from parliamentary politics; an event was conceived and the race began, as I think, to be troubled by that event's long gestation. Dr. Hyde founded the Gaelic League, which was for many years to substitute for political argument a Gaelic grammar, and for political meetings village gatherings, where songs were sung and stories told in the Gaelic language. Meanwhile I had begun a movement in English, in the language in which modern Ireland thinks and does its business; founded certain societies where clerks, working men, men of all classes, could study those Irish poets, novelists, and historians who had written in English, and as much of Gaelic literature as had been translated into English. But the great mass of our people, accustomed to interminable political speeches, read little, and so from the very start we felt that we must have a theatre of our own. The theatres of Dublin had nothing about them that we could call our own. They were empty buildings hired by the English travelling companies and we wanted Irish plays and Irish players. When we thought of these plays we thought of everything that was romantic and poetical, for the nationalism we had called up – like that every generation had called up in moments of discouragement – was romantic and poetical. It was not, however, until I met in 1896 Lady Gregory, a member of an old Galway family, who had spent her life between two Galway houses, the house where she was born and the house into which she was married, that such a theatre became possible. All about her lived a peasantry who told stories in a form of English which has much of its syntax from Gaelic, much of its vocabulary from Tudor English, but it was very slowly that we discovered in that speech of theirs our most powerful dramatic instrument, not indeed until she began to write. Though my plays were written without dialect and in English blank verse, I think she was attracted to our movement because their subject matter differed but little from the subject matter of the country stories. Her own house has been protected by her presence, but the house where she was born was burned down by incendiaries some few months ago; and there has been like disorder over the

greater part of Ireland. A trumpery dispute about an acre of land can rouse our people to monstrous savagery, and if in their war with the English auxiliary police they were shown no mercy they showed none: murder answered murder. Yet ignorance and violence can remember the noblest beauty. I have in Galway a little old tower, and when I climb to the top of it I can see at no great distance a green field where stood once the thatched cottage of a famous country beauty, the mistress of a small local landed proprietor. I have spoken to old men and women who remembered her, though all are dead now, and they spoke of her as the old men upon the wall of Troy spoke of Helen; nor did man and woman differ in their praise. One old woman, of whose youth the neighbors cherished a scandalous tale, said of her, «I tremble all over when I think of her»; and there was another old woman on the neighbouring mountain who said, «The sun and the moon never shone on anybody so handsome, and her skin was so white that it looked blue, and she had two little blushes on her cheeks.» And there were men that told of the crowds that gathered to look at her upon a fair day, and of a man «who got his death swimming a river», that he might look at her. It was a song written by the Gaelic poet Raftery that brought her such great fame and the cottagers still sing it, though there are not so many to sing it as when I was young:

O star of light and O sun in harvest,
O amber hair, O my share of the world,
It is Mary Hynes, the calm and easy woman,
Has beauty in her body and in her mind.

It seemed as if the ancient world lay all about us with its freedom of imagination, its delight in good stories, in man's force and woman's beauty, and that all we had to do was to make the town think as the country felt; yet we soon discovered that the town could only think town thought.

In the country you are alone with your own violence, your own heaviness, and with the common tragedy of life, and if you have any artistic capacity you desire beautiful emotion; and, certain that the seasons will be the same always, care not how fantastic its expression.[1] In the town, where everybody crowds upon you, it is your neighbour not yourself that you hate and, if you are not to embitter his life and your own life, perhaps even if you are not to murder him in some kind of revolutionary frenzy, somebody must teach reality and justice. You will hate that teacher for a while, calling his books and plays ugly, misdirected, morbid or something of that kind, but you must agree with him in the end. We were to find ourselves in a quarrel with public opinion that compelled us against our own will and the will of our players to become always more realistic, substituting dialect for verse, common speech for dialect.

I had told Lady Gregory that I saw no likelihood of getting money for a theatre and so must put away that hope, and she promised to find the money among her friends. Her neighbour, Mr. Edward Martyn, paid for our first performances; and our first players came from England; but presently we began our real work with a little company of Irish amateurs.[2] Somebody had asked me at a lecture, «Where will you get your actors?» and I said, «I will go into some crowded room and put the name of

everybody in it on a piece of paper and put all those pieces of paper into a hat and draw the first twelve.» I have often wondered at that prophecy, for though it was spoken probably to confound and confuse a questioner, it was very nearly fulfilled. Our two best men actors were not indeed chosen by chance, for one was a stage-struck solicitor's clerk and the other a working man who had toured Ireland in a theatrical company managed by a negro. I doubt if he had learned much in it, for its methods were rough and noisy, the negro whitening his face when he played a white man, and, so strong is stage convention, blackening it when he played a black man. If a player had to open a letter on the stage, I have no doubt that he struck it with the flat of his hand, as I have seen players do in my youth, a gesture that lost its meaning generations ago when blotting paper was substituted for sand. We got our women, however, from a little political society which described its object as educating the children of the poor, which meant, according to its enemies, teaching them a catechism that began with this question, «What is the origin of evil?», and the answer, «England».

And they came to us for patriotic reasons and acted from precisely the same impulse that had made them teach, and yet two of them proved players of genius: Miss Allgood and Miss «Maire O Neill ». They were sisters, one all simplicity, her mind shaped by folk song and folk stories; the other sophisticated, lyrical, and subtle. I do not know what their thoughts were as that strange new power awoke within them, but I think they must have suffered from a bad conscience, a feeling that the old patriotic impulse had gone, that they had given themselves up to vanity or ambition. Yet I think it was that first misunderstanding of themselves that made their peculiar genius possible, for had they come to us with theatrical ambitions they would have imitated some well known English player and sighed for well-known English plays. Nor would they have found their genius if we had not remained for a long time obscure like the bird within its shell, playing in little halls, generally in some shabby, out-of-the-way street. We could experiment and wait, with nothing to fear but political misunderstanding. We had little money and at first needed little, twenty-five pounds given by Lady Gregory and twenty pounds by myself and a few pounds picked up here and there. And our theatrical organization was preposterous, players and authors all sat together and settled by vote what play should be performed and who should play it. It took a series of disturbances, weeks of argument, during which no performance could be given, before Lady Gregory and John Synge and I were put in control. And our relations with the public were even more disturbed. One play was violently attacked by the patriotic press because it described a married peasant woman who had a lover, and when we published the old Aran folk tale upon which it was founded, the press said the story had been copied from some decadent author of Pagan Rome. Presently Lady Gregory wrote her first comedy. My verse plays were not long enough to fill an evening and so she wrote a little play on a country love story in the dialect of her neighbourhood. A countryman returns from America with a hundred pounds and discovers his old sweetheart married to a bankrupt farmer. He plays cards with the farmer and, by cheating against himself, gives him the hundred pounds. The company refused to perform that play because they said to admit an emigrant's return with a hundred pounds would encourage emigration. We produced evidence of returned emigrants with much larger sums but were told that only made the matter worse. Then after this interminable argument had worn us all out, Lady Gregory agreed to reduce the sum

to twenty and the actors gave way. That little play was sentimental and conventional, but her next discovered her genius. She, too, had desired to serve, and that genius must have seemed miraculous to herself. She was in middle life and had written nothing but a volume of political memoirs and had no interest in the theatre.

Nobody reading today her *Seven Short Plays* can understand why one of them, now an Irish classic, *The Rising of the Moon*, could not be performed for two years because of political hostility. A policeman discovers an escaped Fenian prisoner and lets him free, because the prisoner has aroused with some old songs the half forgotten patriotism of his youth. The players would not perform it because they said it was an unpatriotic act to admit that a policeman was capable of patriotism. One well known leader of the mob wrote to me, «How can the Dublin mob be expected to fight the police if it looks upon them as capable of patriotism?» When performed at last the play was received with enthusiasm, but only to get us into new trouble. The chief Unionist Dublin newspaper denounced it for slandering his Majesty's forces, and Dublin Castle, the centre of English Government in Ireland, denied to us privileges which we had shared with the other Dublin theatres, of buying for stage purposes the cast off clothes of the police. Castle and Press alike knew that the police had frequently let off political prisoners but «that only made the matter worse». Every political party had the same desire to substitute for life, which never does the same thing twice, a bundle of reliable principles and assertions.[3] Nor did religious orthodoxy like us any better than political; my *Countess Cathleen* was denounced by Cardinal Logue as an heretical play, and when I wrote that we would like to perform «foreign masterpieces », a Nationalist newspaper declared that «a foreign masterpiece is a very dangerous thing ». The little halls where we performed could hold a couple of hundred people at the utmost and our audience was often not more than twenty or thirty, and we performed but two or three times a month and during our periods of quarrelling not even that. But there was no lack of leading articles, we were from the first a recognised public danger. Two events brought us victory, a friend gave us a theatre, and we found a strange man of genius, John Synge. After a particularly angry leading article I had come in front of the curtain and appealed to the hundred people of the audience for their support. When I came down from the stage an old friend, Miss Horniman, from whom I had been expecting a contribution of twenty pounds, said, «I will find you a theatre.» She found and altered for our purpose what is now the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and gave us a small subsidy for a few years.

I had met John Synge in Paris in 1896. Somebody had said, «There is an Irishman living on the top floor of your hotel; I will introduce you.» I was very poor, but he was much poorer. He belonged to a very old Irish family and though a simple, courteous man, remembered it and was haughty and lonely. With just enough to keep him from starvation, and not always from half starvation, he had wandered about Europe travelling third class or upon foot, playing his fiddle to poor men on the road or in their cottages. He was the man that we needed because he was the only man I have ever known incapable of a political thought or of a humanitarian purpose. He could walk the roadside all day with some poor man without any desire to do him good, or for any reason except that he liked him. He was to do for Ireland, though more by his influence on other dramatists than by his direct influence, what Robert Burns did for

Scotland. When Scotland thought herself gloomy and religious, Providence restored her imaginative spontaneity by raising up Robert Burns to commend drink and the devil. I did not, however, see what was to come when I advised John Synge to go to a wild island off the Galway coast and study its life because that life «had never been expressed in literature». He had learned Gaelic at College, and I told him that, as I would have told it to any young man who had learned Gaelic and wanted to write. When he found that wild island he became happy for the first time, escaping as he said «from the nullity of the rich and the squalor of the poor». He had bad health, he could not stand the island hardship long, but he would go to and fro between there and Dublin.

Burns himself could not have more shocked a gathering of Scotch clergy than did he our players. Some of the women got about him and begged him to write a play about the rebellion of '98, and pointed out very truthfully that a play on such a patriotic theme would be a great success. He returned at the end of a fortnight with a scenario upon which he had toiled in his laborious way. Two women take refuge in a cave, a Protestant woman and a Catholic, and carry on an interminable argument about the merits of their respective religions. The Catholic woman denounces Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth, and the Protestant woman the Inquisition and the Pope. They argue in low voices because one is afraid of being ravished by the rebels and the other by the loyal soldiers. But at last either the Protestant or the Catholic says that she prefers any fate to remaining any longer in such wicked company and climbs out. The play was neither written nor performed, and neither then nor at any later time could I discover whether Synge understood the shock that he was giving. He certainly did not foresee in any way the trouble that his greatest play brought on us all.

When I had landed from a fishing yawl on the middle of the island of Aran, a few months before my first meeting with Synge, a little group of islanders, who had gathered to watch a stranger's arrival, brought me to «the oldest man upon the island.»He spoke but two sentences, speaking them very slowly, «If any gentleman has done a crime we'll hide him. There was a gentleman that killed his father and I had him in my house three months till he got away to America. It was a play founded on that old man's story Synge brought back with him. A young man arrives at a little public house and tells the publican's daughter that he has murdered his father. He so tells it that he has all her sympathy, and every time he retells it, with new exaggerations and additions, he wins the sympathy of somebody or other, for it is the countryman's habit to be against the law. The countryman thinks the more terrible the crime the greater must the provocation have been. The young man himself under the excitement of his own story becomes gay, energetic, and lucky. He prospers in love and comes in first at the local races and bankrupts the roulette table afterwards. Then the father arrives with his head bandaged but very lively, and the people turn upon the impostor. To win back their esteem he takes up a spade to kill his father in earnest, but horrified at the threat of what had sounded so well in the story, they bind him to hand over to the police. The father releases him and father and son walk off together, the son, still buoyed up by his imagination, announcing that he will be master henceforth. Picturesque, poetical, fantastical, a masterpiece of style and of music, the

supreme work of our dialect theatre, it roused the populace to fury. We played it under police protection, seventy police in the theatre the last night, and five hundred, some newspaper said, keeping order in the streets outside. It is never played before any Irish audience for the first time without something or other being flung at the players. In New York a currant cake and a watch were flung, the owner of the watch claiming it at the stage door afterwards. The Dublin audience has, however, long since accepted the play. It has noticed, I think, that everyone upon the stage is somehow lovable and companionable, and that Synge described, through an exaggerated symbolism, a reality which he loved precisely because he loved all reality. So far from being, as they had thought, a politician working in the interests of England, he was so little a politician that the world merely amused him and touched his pity. Yet when Synge died in 1910 opinion had hardly changed, we were playing to an almost empty theatre and were continually denounced in the Press. Our victory was won by those who had learned from him courage and sincerity but belonged to a different school. Synge's work, the work of Lady Gregory, my own *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, and my *Hour glass* in its prose form, are characteristic of our first ambition. They bring the imagination and speech of the country, all that poetical tradition descended from the middle ages, to the people of the town. Those who learned from Synge had often little knowledge of the country and always little interest in its dialect. Their plays are frequently attacks upon obvious abuses, the bribery at the appointment of a dispensary Doctor, the attempts of some local politician to remain friends with all parties. Indeed the young Ministers and party politicians of the Free State have had, I think, some of their education from our plays. Then, too, there are many comedies which are not political satires, though they are concerned with the life of the politic ridden people of the town. Of these Mr. Lennox Robinson's are the best known; his *Whiteheaded Boy* has been played in England and America. Of late it has seemed as if this school were coming to an end, for the old plots are repeated with slight variations and the characterization grows mechanical. It is too soon yet to say what will come to us from the melodrama and tragedy of the last four years, but if we can pay our players and keep our theatre open, something will come.[4] We are burdened with debt, for we have come through war and civil war and audiences grow thin when there is firing in the streets. We have, however, survived so much that I believe in our luck, and think that I have a right to say I end my lecture in the middle or even perhaps at the beginning of the story. But certainly I have said enough to make you understand why, when I received from the hands of your King the great honour your Academy has conferred upon me, I felt that a young man's ghost should have stood upon one side of me and at the other a living woman in her vigorous old age. I have seen little in this last week that would not have been memorable and exciting to Synge and to Lady Gregory, for Sweden has achieved more than we have hoped for our own country. I think most of all perhaps of that splendid spectacle of your court, a family beloved and able that has gathered about it not the rank only but the intellect of its country. No like spectacle will in Ireland show its work of discipline and of taste, though it might satisfy a need of the race no institution created by English or American democracy can satisfy.

Documentary

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1923/yeats/documentary/

A short clip of Nobel Laureate in Literature William Butler Yeats when he arrived at the Central Station in Stockholm for the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony held on 10 December 1923.

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William Butler Yeats Award

William Butler Yeats, born 13 June 1865, died 28 January 1939, was an Irish poet and playwright, and one of the foremost figures of 20th century literature. Yeats was born in Sandymount, County Dublin, a member of the Anglo-Irish ruling class. Raised in County Sligo, as a member of the Protestant Ascendancy, he grew up during a time of political and social change in Ireland which, even though supportive of the nationalist revival, directly disadvantaged his heritage.

The revival of strong and popular Irish nationalism fueled by the ancient literature, songs and stories of the Gaels took hold of his generation. Finding inspiration in this literature, he wrote from the same wellspring and developed with others of his generation what would be remembered as the Irish Renaissance. He gave voice to an ancient people searching for its place in the modern world, and with this new voice, that place was secured.

He was a driving force behind the Irish Literary Revival, and along with Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn and George Moore, in 1899 established the Irish Literary Theatre (the Abbey Theater) in Dublin for the purpose of performing plays highlighting Irish authors in both Irish and English languages. Yeats served as its director during its early years.

In 1923 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his inspired poetry. He was the first Irishman so honored.

From the very foundations of Irish civilization, words have been the cords that give voice to the direction we follow. Whether Irish Gaelic or English, whether

spoken or written, the Irish love of verse and prose is as strong today as in ancient times when "men of letters" held a distinct and honored place at the top of society.

The Council of Irish Associations of Greater Bergen County is honored to present an annual award to an outstanding individual whose contributions in the field of literature defines their inheritance from the ancient Gaels to a modern people taking its part on the world stage and giving voice to the Irish experience.

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WB Yeats Nobel Centenary Celebration

100 years since the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature

https://www.nli.ie/news-stories/news/wb-yeats-nobel-centenary-celebration

2023 marks the centenary of the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to WB Yeats "for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation".

To celebrate his remarkable achievement the National Library is engaged in two major collaborations. A series of lectures will be presented as a partner in a programme with the Yeats Society, and supported by funding from DTCAGSM. The second project is a video series collaboration with Seanad Éireann to reflect Yeats' literary and political achievements.

NLI Yeats 100 Lecture Series

The following Yeats Nobel Centenary Lectures series runs from November to December 2023 and all are available to watch online via Zoom:

Online talk | WB Yeats' India: Revisiting Yeats' engagements with interlocutors from the subcontinent

Tuesday, 17 October, 5.30pm

Speaker: Dr Ragini Mohite, Assistant Professor,
FLAME University, India

- While William Butler Yeats never visited India, it remained for him a place of creative and spiritual interest, one he experienced through the lens of his various interlocutors at different points in his lifetime: Mohini Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, and lastly, Shri Purohit Swami.
- In this free online talk, **Dr Ragini Mohite** explores Yeats' idea of India. In the centenary year of Yeats' Nobel Prize, discover his relationship with fellow Nobel winner Rabindranath Tagore and look through some of Yeats' India-related works

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Legacy

Yeats is commemorated in Sligo town by a statue, sculpted by Rowan Gillespie in 1989. On the 50th anniversary of the poet's death, it was erected outside the Ulster Bank. When receiving his Nobel Prize in Stockholm, Yeats had remarked on the similarities between that city's Royal Palace and the Ulster Bank. Across the river is the Yeats Memorial Building, which houses the Sligo Yeats Society. *Standing Figure: Knife Edge* by Henry Moore is displayed in the W. B. Yeats Memorial Garden at St Stephen's Green in Dublin.

Composer Marcus Paus' choral work *The Stolen Child* (2009) is based on poetry by Yeats. Critic Stephen Eddins described it as "sumptuously lyrical and magically wild, and [...] beautifully [capturing] the alluring mystery and danger and melancholy" of Yeats. Argentine composer Julia Stilman-Lasansky based her *Cantata No. 4* on text by Yeats.

A blue plaque dedicated to Yeats is at Balscadden House on the Balscadden Road in Howth, which was his cottage home from 1880 to 1883. In 1957 the London County Council erected a plaque at his former residence on 23 Fitzroy Road, Primrose Hill, London.

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Videos

[01] The Passions of William Butler Yeats | Historical Documentary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlhKTfg83CY [27:42]

[02] William Butler Yeats, Selected Poems

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDIQjSFQRcw [1:17:00]

The great Irish Poet William Butler Yeats is associated with Irish nationalism but he also illustrates the inherent chaos present in the Romantic notion of nature, which is central to the modern notion of the nation state.

[03] English Literature | William Butler Yeats - Life and Works

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZGUQGIPzVg [27:59]

William Butler Yeats is widely considered to be one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. He belonged to the Protestant, Anglo-Irish minority that had controlled the economic, political, social, and cultural life of Ireland since at least the end of the 17th century.

[04] Introduction to Literature: Poetry 3. William Butler Yeats, John Keats

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwmgIkNINKE [48:49]

From Spring 2020, these are the last of my online lectures from when I was an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota. The first 2/3 of this Introduction to Literature class, focused on fiction and drama, had been in person; the final third, on poetry, were online lectures during the pandemic. This one discusses W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming" and John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

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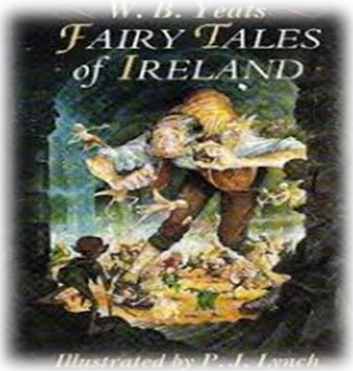
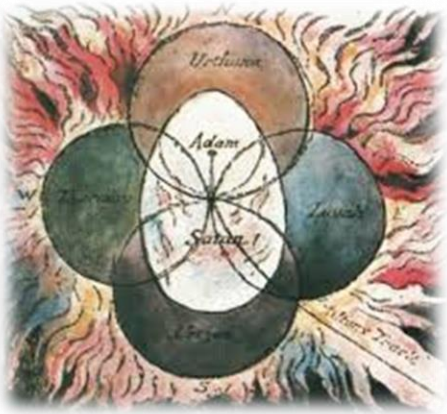

W. B. Yeats
FAIRY TALES
of IRELAND
Illustrated by P. J. Lynch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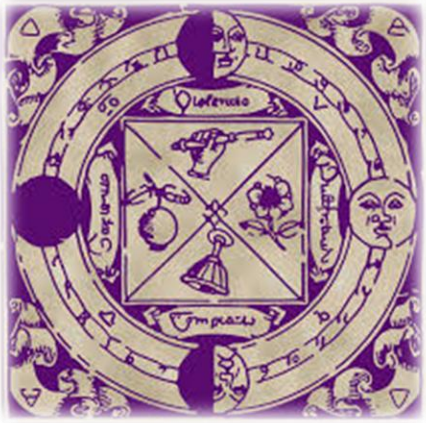
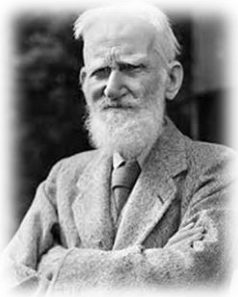


Yeats 100

26 Jul 1856



2 Nov 1950

George Bernard Shaw

Nobel Prize in Literature 1925

Born: 26 July 1856, Dublin, Ireland
Died: 2 November 1950, Ayot St. Lawrence, United Kingdom
Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom
Prize motivation:

"for his work which is marked by both idealism and humanity, its stimulating satire often being infused with a singular poetic beauty"

Language: English

George Bernard Shaw received his Nobel Prize one year later, in 1926.

Prize share: 1/1

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1925/shaw/facts/}

George Bernard Shaw received his Nobel Prize one year later, in 1926. During the selection process in 1925, the Nobel Committee for Literature decided that none of the year's nominations met the criteria as outlined in the will of Alfred Nobel. According to the Nobel Foundation's statutes, the Nobel Prize can in such a case be reserved until the following year, and this statute was then applied. George

Bernard Shaw therefore received his Nobel Prize for 1925 one year later, in 1926.

Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1911, by Gilbert Murray
- Literature 1912, by Kristian Birch-Reichenwald Aars
- Literature 1921, by Henrik Schück
- Literature 1924, by Tor Hedberg
- Literature 1925, by Tor Hedberg
- Literature 1926, by Tor Hedberg
- Literature 1926, by Lars Olof Jonathan (Nathan) Söderblom

Links to other sites

[01] On George Bernard Shaw from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] About GB Shaw from George Bernard Shaw Society

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Per Hallström,
Chairman of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy, on 10 Dec 1926

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1925/ceremony-speech/}

George Bernard Shaw showed in the novels of his youth the same conception of the world and the same attitude to social problems that he has maintained ever since. This provides a better defence for him than anything else against the repeated accusations of lack of honesty and of acting as a professional buffoon at the court of democracy. From the very beginning his convictions have been so firm that it seems as if the general process of development, without having any substantial influence on himself, has carried him along to the tribune from which he now speaks. His ideas were those of a somewhat abstract logical radicalism; hence they were far from new, but they received from him a new definiteness and brilliance. In him these ideas combined with a ready wit, a complete absence of respect for any kind of convention, and the merriest humour – all gathered together in an extravagance which has scarcely ever before appeared in literature.

What puzzled people most was his rollicking gaiety: they were ready to believe that the whole thing was a game and a desire to startle. This was so far from being true that Shaw himself has been able to declare with a greater justice that his careless attitude was a mere stratagem: he had to fool people into laughing so they should not hit upon the idea of hanging him. But we know very well that he would hardly have been frightened out of his outspokenness by anything that might have happened, and that he chose his weapons just as much because they suited him as because they were the most effective. He wielded them with the certitude of genius, which rested on an absolutely quiet conscience and on a faithful conviction.

Early he became a prophet of revolutionary doctrines, quite varied in their value, in the spheres of aesthetics and sociology, and he soon won for himself a notable position as a debater, a popular speaker, and a journalist. He set his mark on the English theatre as a champion of Ibsen and as an opponent of superficial tradition, both English and Parisian. His own dramatic production began quite late, at the age of thirty-six, in order to help satisfy the demands that he had aroused. He wrote his plays with instinctive sureness, based on the certainty that he had a great deal to say.

In this casual manner he came to create what is to some extent a new kind of dramatic art, which must be judged according to its own special principles. Its novelty does not lie so much in structure and form; from his wide-awake and trained knowledge of the theatre, he promptly and quite simply obtains any scenic effect he feels necessary for his ends. But the directness with which he puts his ideas into practice is entirely his own; and so too are the bellicosity, the mobility, and the multiplicity of his ideas.

In France he has been called the Molière of the twentieth century; and there is some truth in the parallel, for Shaw himself believes that he was following classical tendencies in dramatic art. By classicism he means the rigorously rational and dialectical bent of mind and the opposition to everything that could be called romanticism.

He began with what he calls *Plays Unpleasant* (1898), so named because they brought the spectator face to face with unpleasant facts and cheated him of the thoughtless entertainment or sentimental edification that he expected from the stage. These plays dwell on serious abuses – the exploitation and prostitution of poor people, while those who perpetrate these abuses manage to retain their respectability.

It is characteristic of Shaw that his orthodox socialistic severity toward the community is combined with a great freedom from prejudice and a genuine psychological insight when he deals with the individual sinner. Even in these

early pieces one of his finest qualities, his humanity, is fully and clearly marked.

Plays Pleasant (1898), with which he varied his program, have on the whole the same purport but are lighter in tone. With one of these he gained his first great success. This was *Arms and the Man*, an attempt to demonstrate the flimsiness of military and heroic romance, in contrast to the sober and prosaic work of peace. Its pacifist tendency won from the audience a more ready approbation than the author had generally received. In *Candida*, a kind of *Doll's House* with a happy ending, he created the work which for a long time was his most poetical one. This was due chiefly to the fact that in this play the strong superior woman which for him – for reasons unknown to us – has become the normal type, has here been given a richer, warmer, and more gentle soul than elsewhere.

In *Man and Superman* (1903) he took his revenge by proclaiming that woman, because of her resolute and undisguisedly practical nature, is destined to be the superman whose coming has been so long prophesied with such earnest yearning. The jest is amusing, but its creator seems to regard it more or less seriously, even if one takes into account his spirit of opposition to the earlier English worship of the gentle female saint.

His next great drama of ideas, *Major Barbara* (1905), has a deeper significance. It discusses the problem of whether evil ought to be conquered by the inner way, the spirit of joyful and religious sacrifice; or by the outer way, the eradication of poverty, the real foundation of all social defects. Shaw's heroine, one of his most remarkable female characters, ends in a compromise between the power of money and that of the Salvation Army. The process of thought is here carried out with great force, and naturally with a great deal of paradox. The drama is not entirely consistent, but it reveals a surprisingly fresh and clear conception of the joy and poetry of the life of practical faith. Shaw the rationalist here shows himself more liberal and more chivalrous than is customary with the type.

Time does not permit us to hint at the course of his further campaign even in his more outstanding works: suffice it to say that without a trace of opportunism he turns his weapons against everything that he conceives as prejudice in whatever camp it may be found. His boldest assault would seem to be in *Heartbreak House* (1919), where he sought to embody – always in the light of the comic spirit – every kind of perversity, artificiality, and morbidity that flourishes in a state of advanced civilization, playing with vital values, the hardening of the conscience, and the ossification of the heart, under a frivolous preoccupation with art and science, politics, money-hunting, and erotic philandering. But, whether owing to the excessive wealth of the material or to the difficulty of treating it gaily, the piece has sunk into a mere museum of eccentricities with the ghost-like appearance of a shadowy symbolism.

In *Back to Methuselah* (1921) he achieved an introductory essay that was even more brilliant than usual, but his dramatic presentation of the thesis, that man must have his natural age doubled many times over in order to acquire enough sense to manage his world, furnished but little hope and little joy. It looked as if the writer of the play had hypertrophied his wealth of ideas to the great injury of his power of organic creation.

But then came *Saint Joan* (1923), which showed this man of surprises at the height of his power as a poet. This it did especially on the stage, where all that was most valuable and central in the play was thrown into due relief and revealed its real weight, even against the parts that might evoke opposition. Shaw had not been happy in his previous essays in historical drama; and this was natural enough, as he happened to combine with his abundant and quick intelligence a decided lack of historical imagination and sense of historical reality. His world lacked one dimension, that of time, which according to the newest theories is not without significance for space. This led to an unfortunate lack of respect for all that had once been and to a tendency to represent everything as diametrically opposite to what ordinary mortals had previously believed or said.

In *Saint Joan* his good head still cherishes the same opinion on the whole, but his good heart has found in his heroine a fixed point in the realm of the unsubstantial, from which it has been able to give flesh and blood to the visions of the imagination. With doubtful correctness he has simplified her image, but he has also made uncommonly fresh and living the lines that remain, and he has endowed *Saint Joan* with the power of directly holding the multitude. This imaginative work stands more or less alone as a revelation of heroism in an age hardly favourable to genuine heroism. The mere fact that it did not fail makes it highly remarkable; and the fact that it was able to make a triumphal progress all around the world is in this case evidence of considerable artistic worth.

If from this point we look back on Shaw's best works, we find it easier in many places, beneath all his sportiveness and defiance, to discern something of the same idealism that has found expression in the heroic figure of Saint Joan. His criticism of society and his perspective of its course of development may have appeared too nakedly logical, too hastily thought out, too unorganically simplified; but his struggle against traditional conceptions that rest on no solid basis and against traditional feelings that are either spurious or only half genuine, have borne witness to the loftiness of his aims. Still more striking is his humanity; and the virtues to which he has paid homage in his unemotional way – spiritual freedom, honesty, courage, and clearness of thought – have had so very few stout champions in our times.

What I have said has given a mere glimpse of Shaw's life-work, and scarcely anything has been said about his famous prefaces – or rather treatises – accompanying most of the plays. Great parts of them are insurpassable in their clarity, their quickness, and their brilliance. The plays themselves have given him the position of one of the most fascinating dramatic authors of our day, while his prefaces have given him the rank of the Voltaire of our time – if we think only of the best of Voltaire. From the point of view of a pure and simple style they would seem to provide a supreme, and in its way classic, expression of the thought and polemics of an age highly journalistic in tone, and, even more important, they strengthen Shaw's distinguished position in English literature.

At the banquet, Mr. Shaw's thanks were presented by the British Ambassador, Sir Arthur Grant Duff, who expressed particular appreciation of the fact that the Prize given to Mr. Shaw would be used to strengthen the cultural relations between Sweden and Great Britain.

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Documentary

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1925/shaw/documentary/}

[01] George Bernard Shaw pays tribute to Professor Albert Einstein in an after-dinner speech at the Savoy Hotel in London, England, 27 October 1930*.

* The event is described in a book by Abraham Pais, *Einstein Lived Here* (page 181), published by Clarendon Press in 1994.

[02] George Bernard Shaw comments his visit in America.

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Books of GBS

01]https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_works_by_George_Bernard_Shaw

02]https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Bernard-Shaw

03]https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/george-bernard-shaw

04]https://www.thriftbooks.com/a/george-bernard-shaw/210830/?srsltid=AfmBOophkSy_-AT_Tw8XQchxCQlBZTz-z3KOq-MLEQB82HBrdeG5g3ZU

05]https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/author/467

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Brief Biography

{https://web.english.upenn.edu/~cmazer/mis1.html}

Bernard Shaw: a Brief Biography

Cary M. Mazer, University of Pennsylvania
Guest Dramaturg

G. Bernard Shaw (he hated the "George" and never used it, either personally or professionally) was born in 1856 in Dublin, in a lower-middle class family of Scottish-Protestant ancestry. His father was a failed corn-merchant, with a drinking problem and a squint (which Oscar Wilde's father, a leading Dublin surgeon, tried unsuccessfully to correct); his mother was a professional singer, the sole disciple of Vandeleur Lee, a voice teacher claiming to have a unique and original approach to singing.

When Shaw was just short of his sixteenth birthday, his mother left her husband and son and moved with Vandeleur Lee to London, where the two set up a household, along with Shaw's older sister Lucy (who later became a successful music hall singer). Shaw remained in Dublin with his father, completing his schooling (which he hated passionately), and working as a clerk for an estate office (which he hated just as much as school).

It may not be a accidental, then, that Shaw's plays, including *Misalliance*, are filled with problematic parent-child relationships: with children who are brought up in isolation from their parents; with foundlings, orphans, and adopted heirs; and

with parents who wrongly presume that they are entitled to their children's obedience and affection.

In 1876, Shaw left Dublin and his father and moved to London, moving in with his mother's *menage*. There he lived off of his mother and sister while pursuing a career in journalism and writing. The first medium he tried as a creative writer was prose, completing five novels (the first one appropriately titled *Immaturity*) before any of them were published. He read voraciously, in public libraries and in the British Museum reading room. And he became involved in progressive politics. Standing on soapboxes, at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park and at socialist rallies, he learned to overcome his stagefright and his stammer. And, to hold the attention of the crowd, he developed an energetic and aggressive speaking style that is evident in all of his writing.

With Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Shaw founded the Fabian Society, a socialist political organization dedicated to transforming Britain into a socialist state, not by revolution but by systematic progressive legislation, bolstered by persuasion and mass education. The Fabian society would later be instrumental in founding the London School of Economics and the Labour Party. Shaw lectured for the Fabian Society, and wrote pamphlets on the progressive arts, including *The Perfect Wagnerite*, an interpretation of Richard Wagner's Ring cycle, and *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, based on a series of lectures about the progressive Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen. Meanwhile, as a journalist, Shaw worked as an art critic, then as a music critic (writing under the pseudonym "Corno di Bassetto"), and finally, from 1895 to 1898, as Theatre Critic for the *Saturday Review*, where his reviews appeared over the infamous initials "GBS."

In 1891, at the invitation of J.T. Grein, a merchant, theatre critic, and director of a progressive private new-play society, The Independent Theatre, Shaw wrote his first play, *Widower's Houses*. For the next twelve years, he wrote close to a dozen plays, though he generally failed to persuade the managers of the London Theatres to produce them. A few were produced abroad; one (*Arms and the Man*) was produced under the

auspices of an experimental management; one (*Mrs Warren's Profession*) was censored by the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays (the civil servant who, from 1737 until 1967, was empowered with the prior censorship of all spoken drama in England); and several were presented in single performances by private societies.

In 1898, after a serious illness, Shaw resigned as theatre critic, and moved out of his mother's house (where he was still living) to marry Charlotte Payne-Townsend, an Irish woman of independent means. Their marriage (quite possibly sexually unconsummated) lasted until Charlotte's death in 1943.

In 1904, Harley Granville Barker, an actor, director and playwright twenty years younger than Shaw who had appeared in a private theatre society's production of Shaw's *Candida*, took over the management of the Court Theatre on Sloane Square in Chelsea (outside of the "Theatreland" of the fashionable West End) and set up it up as an experimental theatre specializing in new and progressive drama. Over the next three seasons, Barker produced ten plays by Shaw (with Barker officially listed as director, and with Shaw actually directing his own plays), and Shaw began writing new plays with Barker's management specifically in mind. Over the next ten years, all but one of Shaw's plays (*Pygmalion* in 1914) was produced either by Barker or by Barker's friends and colleagues in the other experimental theater managements around England. With royalties from his plays, Shaw, who had become financially independent on marrying, now became quite wealthy. Throughout the decade, he remained active in the Fabian Society, in city government (he served as vestryman for the London borough of St. Pancras), and on committees dedicated to ending dramatic censorship, and to establishing a subsidized National Theatre.

The outbreak of war in 1914 changed Shaw's life. For Shaw, the war represented the bankruptcy of the capitalist system, the last desperate gasps of the nineteenth-century empires, and a tragic waste of young lives, all under the guise of patriotism. He expressed his opinions in a series of newspaper articles under the title *Common Sense About the War*. These articles proved to be a disaster for Shaw's public stature: he was treated as an

outcast in his adopted country, and there was even talk of his being tried for treason. His dramatic output ground to a halt, and he succeeded in writing only one major play during the war years, *Heartbreak House*, into which he projected his bitterness and despair about British politics and society.

After the war, Shaw found his dramatic voice again and rebuilt his reputation, first with a series of five plays about "creative evolution," *Back to Methuselah*, and then, in 1923, with *Saint Joan*. In 1925 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. (Not needing the money, he donated the cash award towards an English edition of the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, who had never been recognized with a Nobel prize by the Swedish Academy). Shaw's plays were regularly produced and revived in London. Several theatre companies in the United States began producing his plays, old and new, on a regular basis (most notably the Theatre Guild in New York, and the Hedgerow Theatre, in Rose Valley, PA, which became internationally known for its advocacy of the plays of Shaw and the Irish playwright Sean O'Casey). In the late 1920s, a Shaw festival was established in England (in a town, coincidentally, named Malvern).

Shaw lived the rest of his life as an international celebrity, travelling the world, continually involved in local and international politics. (He visited the Soviet Union at the invitation of Stalin; and he came briefly to the United States at the invitation of William Randolph Hearst, stepping on shore only twice, for a lecture at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, and for lunch at Hearst's castle in San Simeon in California). And he continued to write thousands of letters and over a dozen more plays.

In 1950, Shaw fell off a ladder while trimming a tree on his property at Ayot St. Lawrence in Hertfordshire, outside of London, and died a few days later of complications from the injury, at age 94. He had been at work on yet another play (*Why She Would Not*). In his will, he left a large part of his estate to a project to revamp the English alphabet. (Only one volume was published with the new "Shaw Alphabet": a parallel text edition of Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion*). After that project failed, the

estate was divided among the other beneficiaries in his will: the National Gallery of Ireland, the British Museum, and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Royalties from Shaw's plays (and from the musical *My Fair Lady*, based on Shaw's *Pygmalion*) have helped to balance the budgets of these institutions ever since.

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George Bernard Shaw <:::> Quotes

While writing his many plays, stories and novels, Shaw supported himself as a journalist, writing for various publications as a book, art and music critic. He lived to age 94 and was a very prolific writer and therefore, as evidenced by this quotation, wasn't all wrapped up in himself.

"**G**ive a man health and a course to steer; and he'll never stop to trouble about whether he's happy or not."

"**S**ome men see things as they are and ask why. Others dream things that never were and ask why not."

"**L**ife isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself."

"**W**e don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."

"**T**he single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

- He who can, does. He who cannot teaches.
- The golden rule is that there are no golden rules.
- I'm only a beer teetotaller, not a champagne teetotaller.
- Nothing is ever done in this world until men are prepared to kill one another if it is not done.
- There are two tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart's desire. The other is to get it.
- There is no love sincerer than the love of food.
- A lifetime of happiness! No man alive could bear it: it would be hell on earth.
- I am a gentleman: I live by robbing the poor.
- An Englishman thinks he is moral when he is only uncomfortable.

- Do not unto others as you would they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same.
- Marriage is popular because it combines the maximum of temptation with the maximum of opportunity.
- Hell is full of musical amateurs: music is the brandy of the damned.
- It's a woman's business to get married as soon as possible, and a man's to keep unmarried as long as he can
- Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few.
- Liberty means responsibility. That's why most men dread it.
- Assassination is the extreme form of censorship.
- The theory of legal procedure is that if you set two liars to expose one another, the truth will emerge.
- Censorship ends in logical completeness when nobody is allowed to read any books except the books that nobody can read.
- The things most people want to know about are usually none of their business.
- Silence is the most perfect expression of scorn.
- As long as I have a want, I have a reason for living. Satisfaction is death.
- Beauty is all very well at first sight, but who ever looks at it when it has been in the house three days?
- Dancing is a perpendicular expression of a horizontal desire.
- Don't waste time collecting other people's autographs; rather devote it to making your own autograph worth collecting.
- The more things a man is ashamed of, the more respectable he is.
- If you eliminate smoking and gambling, you will be amazed to find that almost all an Englishman's pleasures can be, and mostly are, shared by his dog.
- The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity.
- He treats a flower girl as if she was a duchess, and a duchess as if she was a flower girl.
- We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.
- When a stupid man is doing something he is ashamed of, he always declares that it is his duty.
- If you can't get rid of the skeleton in your closet, you'd best teach it to dance.
- The power of accurate observation is frequently called cynicism by those who don't have it.
- A perpetual holiday is a good working definition of Hell.
- There are scores of human insects who are ready at a moment's notice to reveal the will of God on every possible subject.
- You have a choice between the natural stability of gold and the honesty and intelligence of the members of government. And with all due respect for those gentlemen, I advise you, as long as the capitalist system lasts, vote for gold.

- Sister, you're trying to keep me alive as an old curiosity, but I'm done, I'm finished, I'm going to die.

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04]https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191843730.001.0001/q-oro-ed5-00009969

05]https://mncounselingtherapy.com/quotations/george-bernard-shaw-quotes/

06]https://englishwithatwist.com/2013/07/01/10-quotes-by-george-bernard-shaw-another-master-of-the-english-language/

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Timeline

Cary M. Mazer, University of Pennsylvania
Guest Dramaturg

1856:

- George Bernard Shaw born in Dublin.

1876:

- Shaw moves to London and moves in with his mother and her companion/voice teacher.

1878:

- Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll House*.

1884

- Third Reform Bill, granting the vote to all male householders.
- The Fabian Society is founded.

- The London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is founded.
- A steam turbine is used for the first time to generate electricity.

1885

- Gordon is killed at the siege of Khartoum.

1886:

- First bicycles manufactured in Britain.
- Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

1887:

- "Bloody Sunday" riots in Trafalgar Square.
- Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*

1888:

- First electric power station in London.
- Jack the Ripper terrorizes the East End of London.

1889:

- London dock strikes.

1891:

- Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.
- Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

1892:

- Six Fabians (including Sidney Webb) are elected to the London County Council.
- First performance of *Shaw's Widower's Houses*.

1893:

- Irish Home Rule bill defeated in the House of Lords.

1894:

- Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*.

1895:

- London School of Economics founded.
- Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
- Oscar Wilde is convicted and sentenced.
- H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*.

1897:

- Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.
- Workman's Compensation Act
- Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*.
- Bram Stoker, *Dracula*.

1898:

- Spanish-American War.
- *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, Shaw's first two anthologies of plays, are published.

1899-1902:

- The Boer War.

1900:

- The Boxer Rebellion in China.
- First dirigible flight in Germany.

1901:

- Queen Victoria dies, succeeded by her son, Edward VII.
- President William Mckinley is assassinated; Theodore Roosevelt becomes President of the United States.
- Roentgen is awarded the Novel Prize for Physics for the discovery of X-Rays.
- Marconi sends a transatlantic wireless message from Cornwall to Newfoundland.

1903:

- The Wright Brothers make the first powered flight.
- Shaw's *Man and Superman* published.

- Emmeline Pankhurst founds the National Women's Social and Political Union.
- First motorized taxi cabs in London.

1904:

- J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*.
- Shaw's *Candida* performed in a matinee performance at the Court Theatre.
- Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*.
- Rolls-Royce Motor Company founded.

1905:

- Japan defeats Russia in the Russo-Japanese War.
- Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*.
- First London motorbuses.
- Sinn Fein founded in Dublin.
- Albert Einstein publishes his Special Theory of Relativity.
- Industrial Workers of the World founded in Chicago.
- 77,988 automobiles are registered in the United States.
- Chekhov dies.

1906:

- Shaw's *Major Barbara* performed at the Court Theatre.
- San Francisco Earthquake.
- Ibsen dies after a long illness.

1907:

- J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* opens at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, to riots in the theatre and in the streets.
- August Strindberg, *The Ghost Sonata*.
- Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*.
- The Boy Scouts are founded in England by Robert Baden-Powell.
- First helicopter flight.

1908:

- William Howard Taft elected President of the United States.
- Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind and the Willows*.

- Oscar Straus's musical, *The Chocolate Soldier*, opens, based on Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, though without his permission. After legal action, the composer agrees to change the names of the characters and all lines of dialogue taken from the play. Shaw decides never to allow another musical version of any of his plays.

1909:

- NAACP founded in New York.
- The Sixteenth Amendment authorizes income taxes in the United States.
- The Girl Guides (the British equivalent of the Girl Scouts) founded.
- Shaw writes *Misalliance*.

1910:

- *Misalliance* opens at the Duke of York's Theatre.
- Edward VII dies; his son George V becomes king.
- E.M. Forster, *Howard's End*.
- 122,000 telephones are in use in Great Britain.

1911:

- Amundsen reaches the South Poll.
- Joseph Pulitzer establishes the Pulitzer Prize.
- Marie Curie is awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for discovering Radium and Plutonium.

1912:

- Irish Home Rule bill introduced in Parliament; Ulster threatens civil war if it passed.
- Woodrow Wilson becomes President of the United States.
- Jim Thorpe wins the decathlon and the pentathlon at the Stockholm Olympics.
- The Titanic hits an iceberg and sinks on its maiden voyage, leaving 2,200 dead.

1913:

- Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*.
- Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* premieres at the St. James's Theatre.

1914:

- Shaw's *Pygmalion* premieres at His Majesty's Theatre.
- James Joyce, *Dubliners*.
- Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand and his wife are assassinated in Sarajevo, sparking the First World War.

1923:

- Shaw, *Saint Joan*.

1925:

- Shaw is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1950:

- Shaw dies at age 94.

[01] https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/life-of-george-bernard-shaw

[02] https://georgebernardshaw.weebly.com/timeline.html

[03] https://prezi.com/zbhpmend_cid/george-bernard-shaw-timeline/

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Shaw, George Bernard

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Shaw, George Bernard (1856–1950), playwright, was born 26 July 1856 at 3 Upper Synge Street, Dublin, third child and only son of George Carr Shaw (1814–85) of Synge Street, clerk, Four Courts official, then corn merchant, whose English ancestor (of originally Scottish descent) had been granted lands in Kilkenny after service in the Williamite wars, and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw (née Gurly; 1830–1913), gifted amateur singer and music-teacher from a family with landholdings in Carlow. He had two sisters: Lucinda Frances (1853–1920), actress and singer in musical comedy, and Elinor Agnes (1854–76). A member of what he styled the 'downstart' classes, the younger sons of younger sons, he was educated at the Wesleyan Connexional School,

briefly at the Central Model Boys' School, Marlborough Street, and at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School. He did not attend university but started work in 1871, first as clerk and then as cashier with the Dublin land agency Uniacke Townshend. Leaving Dublin for London (where his mother had already moved) at the age of nineteen, he never returned to reside in Ireland and, except for one brief period as an employee of the Edison Telephone Company (1879–80), never again held a full-time salaried post.

EARLY YEARS IN LONDON

In his first years in London, he was largely supported by his mother, eked out by some small income from journalism, while he laboured to produce five novels, from *Immaturity* (written 1879, published 1930) to *An unsocial socialist* (written 1883, published 1887). These were all initially rejected for book publication, though most of them did find their way into print, serialised in socialist magazines of the 1880s, and the best-known, *Cashel Byron's profession* (1886), achieved a certain success. What were to become Shaw's most notable characteristics as a dramatist – polemically unconventional opinions, clear and forceful prose style, antiromantic plotting and characterisation – are all discernible in these novels.

As an unemployed Irishman in London in the 1880s, with inordinate ambition but considerable insecurity, Shaw set about remaking himself as an individual personality in ways that defined his identity outside and against the normal hierarchies of class and culture. Acquiring, sometimes arbitrarily or accidentally, distinctive personal practices and beliefs, such as vegetarianism, opposition to vaccination, interest in phonetics and rationalised spelling, the wearing of all-wool clothing, he made these into lifelong attributes of the persona known as G.B.S.

Central to this self-fashioning was his conversion to socialism, initially by the encounter with Henry George, the American land reformer (1882), and then by the crucial experience of reading Marx (1883), though his Marxist economic thinking was to be substantially modified by the theories of Stanley Jevons. Joining the Fabian Society, the middle-class socialist debating-society and pressure-group, soon after its establishment in 1884, he found there his future long-term political associates Sidney (1859–1947) and Beatrice Webb (1858–1943), and an influential forum for his political activity. The detailed engagement diaries which he maintained most fully between 1885 and 1897 record his constant speaking engagements as a publicist for the Fabian cause, never receiving more than his expenses as remuneration. A skilful if unconventional committeeman in his many years on the council of the Fabian Society, he was the editor of and one of the chief contributors to *Fabian essays in socialism* (1889), a book of remarkable continuing popularity.

The death of his father in 1885, and the consequent removal of his 30*s.* a week support to the family expenses in London, forced Shaw to look for more regular employment as a journalist. This he found as book-reviewer for the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1885–8), as art critic for the *World* (1886–90), and notably as musical critic for the *Star* (1889–90), writing under the pseudonym 'Corno di Bassetto', and for the *World* (1890–94). From their first meeting in 1883, he was to form one of his many continuing and productive friendships with the drama critic and Ibsen translator William Archer (1856–1924): Shaw's first play, 'Widower's houses', though not completed until 1892, was started as a collaboration with Archer in 1884. His theatre criticism, predominantly for the *Saturday Review* (1894–8), was animated by a polemic advocacy of the *avant-garde* theatre of Ibsen, and an often devastating critique of the fashionable society drama deriving from the French plays of Victorien Sardou, which he labelled Sardoodledom. His book *The quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), composed initially as a lecture for the Fabian Society, is a key text for the understanding of both Shaw's theatre practice and his intellectual beliefs, just as his later book *The perfect Wagnerite* (1898) helps to define the centrality of Wagner to his music criticism.

PLAYS, 1894–1914

The plays for which Shaw was eventually to become best-known evolved both out of his social and political thinking and his reforming theatrical zeal. The works that were to be collected as *Plays unpleasant* (1898) were based on the dialectic principles of Ibsen, designed to shock audiences into a reconsideration of their conventional beliefs. Thus as 'Widower's houses' exposed the tacit complicity of middle-class rentiers in slumlordism, the even more controversial 'Mrs Warren's profession' (written in 1893 but denied public performance in Britain until 1926) used the figure of a brothel-keeper to equate marriage with prostitution, both being governed by the cash nexus. Already, however, in 'Arms and the man', the comedy premiered at the Avenue Theatre in 1894 in a double-bill with the first-produced play of W. B. Yeats (qv), 'The land of heart's desire', Shaw had lightened his touch in ridiculing the absurdities of military romance, and his later farce 'You never can tell' (written 1895–6) was typical of the spirit of the collection *Plays pleasant* (1898). Popular as these plays eventually became, and frequently revived as they continue to be more than a hundred years later, they were considered too unconventional to be performed in mainstream theatres in the 1890s, as were Shaw's attempts at melodrama in 'The devil's disciple' (written 1896) and at historical epic in 'Caesar and Cleopatra' (written 1898). The only substantial income Shaw achieved from his playwriting before 1900 came from a highly successful American production of 'The devil's disciple' by the actor-manager Richard Mansfield (1854–1907) in 1897.

Under the pressure of an enormous workload of journalism, political activity, and playwriting, Shaw's health broke down in 1898, when he was saved from any future financial anxieties by marriage to Charlotte Frances (1857–1943; daughter of Horace Payne-Townshend (1824–85) of Ross Carbery, Co. Cork, and Mary Susanna Payne-Townshend (née Kirby; 1830–91)), whom he had met through the Fabian Society and who was to provide important backing for the Fabian project of the London School of Economics (LSE) – from 1899 to 1927, the Shaws' London home was to be in a flat at 10 Adelphi Terrace above the LSE. Though extremely attractive to women, Shaw had been a late developer sexually, losing his virginity to an older woman, Jenny Paterson (*c.*1840–1924), at the age of twenty-nine. He did have one further affair with the actress Florence Farr (1860–1917), who also had a liaison with Yeats, but his relationships with women had generally been intense flirtations where it was possible for him to avoid full commitment. His most passionate love-letters were addressed to actresses such as Ellen Terry (1847–1928) – a correspondence conducted for five years (1895–1900) without their meeting – and later Stella Campbell (1865–1940). His marriage to Charlotte was childless and appears to have been unconsummated, though it was to be an unwavering, lifelong partnership of forty-five years. The relative lack of importance that the physical expression of love had in his own life had its counterpart in his drama, where he consistently resisted the primacy of romantic motivation, attracting criticism that his plays were bloodless and asexual.

Man and superman' (1903), Shaw's first major play of the twentieth century, was a provocative response to such criticism, a rendering of the Don Juan story where it is the male who is the prey rather than predator. This outsize work, 'a comedy and a philosophy', was written without plans for theatrical production, to expound the creed of creative evolution by which the human race is considered to evolve towards ever greater powers of self-understanding; the male urge of the aspirant 'superman' (a Shavian neologism corresponding to Nietzsche's *Übermensch*) to escape the attraction of the material senses in favour of the liberation of thought is matched, in the battle of the sexes, by the woman with her need to conceive the next generation of supermen. A different but equally significant dialectic in Shaw's political thinking is represented in 'Major Barbara' (produced 1905), where the salvationist Barbara is forced to see the crucial basis of all moral force in material force, and thus situate her crusading zeal in relation to the amoral power of her arms-manufacturer father and the intellectual passion of her Greek-professor fiancé. With 'Man and superman' and 'Major Barbara', the third in what can be regarded as a trilogy of major plays of this period is 'John Bull's other island' (produced 1904), Shaw's only full-length play set in Ireland. The intellectual debate in this play is expressed through the three central characters of Broadbent, the Englishman who comes to Ireland full of romantic illusions and hard commercial propositions; Doyle, his engineer partner, the spokesman for Shaw's exposure of the 'real' Ireland and many of his own political

views; and the unfrocked priest Keegan, with a Utopian vision transcending this antithesis.

'John Bull's other island' had been written partly at the urging of Yeats, and it was originally planned for production in what was about to open as the Abbey Theatre (December 1904). However, it proved beyond the capacity of the Irish National Theatre Society and had, in any case, been also scheduled for a simultaneous London production at the Court Theatre, under the management of J. E. Vedrenne (1867–1930) and Shaw's friend the actor-director Harley Granville Barker (1877–1946). In the event this production provided Shaw with his breakthrough as a playwright, a popular success attracting high-level political attention from the then prime minister A. J. Balfour (qv), culminating in a royal command performance. The Vedrenne–Barker seasons at the Court that followed (1904–7) were dominated by Shaw, eleven of whose plays were performed (mostly directed by the dramatist), and made a major contribution to the establishment of the repertory theatre movement in Britain.

In 1905 Shaw made his first return visit to Ireland, staying in his wife's family home in Co. Cork, and this began a pattern in which the Shaws often spent extended holiday stays in the country, most frequently in the south-west. A greater degree of involvement in Irish theatre came also in 1909 when Shaw, in the middle of a polemic campaign against theatrical censorship in Britain, offered the banned play 'The shewing-up of Blanco Posnet' for production at the Abbey, as the lord chamberlain's writ did not run in Ireland. In spite of being threatened with the theatre's closure by the lord lieutenant, the Abbey directors stood firm and successfully produced the play in August 1909. This event led to a close personal relationship between Shaw and Lady Gregory (qv), and some degree of support for the Abbey from Shaw, with the eventual outcome (from 1916 on) of a considerable number of Shaw plays (including the originally rejected 'John Bull') joining the Abbey repertoire.

Shaw's later plays for the Vedrenne–Barker partnership, 'Misalliance' (produced 1908) and 'Getting married' (produced 1910), very loosely structured discussion plays, were less successful, and the enterprise collapsed at considerable financial cost to Shaw. He had, however, his longest-running West End success with 'Fanny's first play' (1911), in spite of the fact that it was produced anonymously. In 1914 came one of Shaw's most popular plays, 'Pygmalion', produced by Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1852–1917) with Mrs Patrick Campbell playing the flower-girl turned into grand lady by phonetic training, a part that Shaw had originally conceived for Campbell some seventeen years earlier. The production was preceded by an intense infatuation of Shaw for his leading performer and ended in his fury with Tree's refusal to accept the

author's direction for the play, contriving to imply a 'happy' ending in which Higgins marries Eliza.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Shaw had continued to play a prominent part in public affairs, largely through the Fabian Society, serving on the St Pancras vestry, then borough council (1897–1903), orchestrating Fabian policy in the Boer war (in which he supported the British against the Boers), on municipal trading (the subject of a 1904 book), agitating for the establishment of a national theatre in Britain (1909–10) and for Irish home rule (1911–12), and assisting in the setting up of the *New Statesman* (1913). It was as a supplement to the *New Statesman* in October 1914 that he published *Common sense about the war*, the extended essay that won him widespread notoriety and hostility for its cool analysis of the origins of the war and resistance to the fervid patriotism of the time. For some years Shaw was intensely unpopular in Britain, though in point of fact he supported the allied war effort, and his one-act play 'O'Flaherty VC' (1915), written for the Abbey, he subsequently called a 'recruiting pamphlet'. It was not performed at the Abbey, however, on the advice of the military authorities in Dublin. Shaw's major play of the war period, 'Heartbreak House' (written 1916–17, published 1919) expressed symbolically his sense of the crisis of western European civilisation in its lack of moral, political, or spiritual integrity, which had made the war possible. At the time of the Easter 1916 rising, Shaw defended the actions of the leaders, and subsequently worked to try to save Roger Casement (qv) from execution, even though he had no sympathy with Irish republican nationalism. In 1917 Shaw lobbied his friend Sir Horace Plunkett (qv), chairman of the Irish convention, to be nominated as one of the delegates, believing that he could have a major influence on its deliberations. His failure to obtain this appointment meant an end to his hopes for active political involvement, and thereafter he sought influence only by his writing.

In the period immediately after the war, Shaw's reputation seemed to be on the wane, at least in Britain where his work was regarded as dated. 'Back to Methuselah' (1921), his 'metabiological pentateuch', dramatising his doctrine of creative evolution in a sequence of five full-length plays beginning with the Creation and ending in a time 'as far as thought can reach', was considered unproduceable. However, his international standing remained high, and his plays were often premiered outside Britain and Ireland, sometimes in translated texts. In 'Saint Joan' (1924) he once again achieved a world-wide success, a play finished in Parknasilla, Co. Kerry, in what proved to be the Shaws' last visit to Ireland. Capitalising on the still relatively recent canonisation of Joan of Arc (1920), Shaw created a provocatively original version of the Maid as a protestant and nationalist before her time, arousing controversy with his epilogue resurrection of Joan in dream dialogue with her friends and enemies, which some

critics judged to ruin an otherwise great tragedy. The part, brilliantly created by Sybil Thorndike, has gone on to be a defining role for women actors, including notably Siobhán McKenna (qv), who first played it in her own Irish translation (1950).

NOBEL PRIZE WINNER

With the award of the 1925 Nobel prize for literature, Shaw's canonical status was confirmed, becoming in his later years one of the most famous people in the world, his views regularly solicited – and given – on every possible subject, an oracle regarded as at once a sage and a clown. Long a favourite subject for painters, with portraits by Augustus John (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), and sculptors, among them Rodin (Musée Rodin, Paris), Epstein (National Portrait Gallery, London), and Troubetskoy (full-length bronze statue, National Gallery of Ireland), he was much photographed, filmed, and caricatured in the press. He attracted and encouraged devotion from loyal theatre companies who specialised in his work: the New York Theatre Guild of Lawrence Langner (1890–1962), which gave American premieres to 'Heartbreak House', 'Saint Joan', and 'Back to Methuselah'; the Macdona Players, who toured for many years with an exclusively Shavian repertoire; Barry Jackson (1879–1961), initially at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre where 'Back to Methuselah' had been staged in 1923, and then at the Malvern Festival, set up by Jackson as a showcase for Shaw, with his political extravaganza 'The apple cart' as its opening production in 1929. He became an early and adept radio broadcaster, and served as chair of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) committee on spoken English (1930–37). Nor was he wanting in recognition in his own country: he was elected the inaugural president of the Irish Academy of Letters (1932–5) and was made a freeman of the city of Dublin in 1946.

With *The intelligent woman's guide to socialism and capitalism* in 1928, Shaw published his major political work, arguing for complete equality of income provided by the state as a key to radical social reform. Long disillusioned with the working of the democratic system, and attracted to centralised control by a highly-trained cadre of meritocratic civil servants, Shaw offended many people by his provocative enthusiasm for the 1930s dictators: Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini. A much publicised visit to Russia in 1931 was the occasion for a brief meeting with Stalin and some very positive statements about the success of communism in the Soviet Union. Shaw had opportunities to air his views on all subjects, including world politics, on extensive travels undertaken with his wife through the decade of the 1930s (South Africa in 1932, a world tour including the Far East and the United States in 1933, New Zealand 1934). His visit to South Africa resulted in *The adventures of the black girl in her search for God* (1932), voicing his heterodox religious vision.

LATER YEARS: 1932–50

Shaw continued to write plays as prolifically as ever, but few of them after 1930 achieved unequivocal success. Fantasy and futurism were features of works such as 'Too true to be good' (1932) and 'The simpleton of the Unexpected Isles' (1935), political satire of 'On the rocks' (1934) and 'Geneva' (1938), and historical debate of 'In good King Charles's golden days' (1939). Pressure mounted for film versions of Shaw's best-known plays – pressure he had resisted before sound was introduced to the movies. German and Dutch film versions of *Pygmalion* were followed in 1938 by the acclaimed British film directed by Gabriel Pascal, for which Shaw as screenwriter won an Academy Award. A 1941 *Major Barbara*, made by the same director, was somewhat less successful, and *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945) a downright failure.

In his eighties Shaw maintained a formidable writing and publishing record, with the substantial treatise *Every man's political what's what* appearing in 1944. His movements were restricted, however, during the war, when he lived almost entirely in 'Shaw's Corner', the country home in Ayot St Lawrence, Hertfordshire, where he had lived with his wife since 1910. A further contraction of Shaw's life came with the death in 1943 of Charlotte, who had been increasingly incapacitated with illness. His ninetieth birthday in 1946 was the occasion for widespread international celebration, largely ignored by Shaw himself, and marked by Penguin Books with the publication of the 'Shaw million': ten of his titles issued in a print run of 100,000 each. Plays ('Buoyant billions' (1947), 'Farfetched fables' (1948), and 'Shakes versus Shav' (1949)) continued to be written until within a year of his death at home on 2 November 1950, after a short illness beginning with a fall while pruning a tree in his ninety-fifth year. His body was cremated, as had been his wife's, and their ashes were mingled and scattered in the garden of 'Shaw's Corner'.

ARCHIVES

He left the bulk of his literary manuscripts to the British Museum (British Library), though his diaries and business papers went to the British Library of Political Science, and the manuscripts of his novels had been donated to the National Library of Ireland (NLI) in 1946; major holdings of his papers are to be found in the Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, and Cornell University (Bernard A. Burgunder collection); other outstanding deposits of Shaviana are the Dan H. Laurence collection at the University of Guelph in Canada, and the Sidney P. Albert collection at Brown University, Rhode Island.

ASSESSMENT

Shaw's hugely active and productive life made for an impact and influence in many different spheres. He cannot be considered a really significant political thinker in his own right, many of his ideas having proved of limited long-term value. However, as a

key publicist for the Fabian Society and close associate of the Webbs, his role in forwarding socialism in Britain, to the point where the Labour party could become one of the major forces in politics, cannot be discounted. He was a tireless campaigner for the issues to which he was committed, including such quixotic projects as alphabet reform (to which he left the bulk of his estate), and a generous benefactor of public causes. It was typical that he should have donated his Nobel prize winnings to a foundation for the translation of Swedish writers into English; by means of special Dáil Éireann legislation (1945) he was enabled to make over inherited property to the town of Carlow; his residuary legatees, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, the British Museum, and the National Gallery of Ireland (having won a legal judgement limiting the amount of his estate to be devoted to a new English alphabet), came to benefit substantially from his bequest to them, ironically most of all from the royalties drawn from *My fair lady*, a musical-comedy version of 'Pygmalion' such as Shaw had always opposed.

Shaw's impact as a writer and personality went well beyond the direct effect of his formal publications. As a wit and conversationalist who contributed some of the most often quoted epigrams in English, as a colossally prolific letter-writer, Shaw energised and illuminated the language and thinking of his contemporaries and of generations after him. The master of a 'plain' prose style of extraordinary rhetorical force and agility, he could make outrageously iconoclastic ideas seem a matter of cant-cutting commonsense. Though he wrote – and talked – far too much, and could become tiresomely wordy in his opinionated rhodomontades, he never lost the ability to hit home to readers or listeners.

The thirty-seven volumes of his Standard Edition (1931–51), the many edited volumes of his other writings, letters, and fugitive pieces, stand as an imposing monument, if inevitably of variable quality. His early music- and theatre-criticism remains astonishingly fresh and lively, the work of a brilliant journalist at the height of his powers. His thinking in the more doctrinal of his works, promoting the philosophy of creative evolution, is much less impressive, appearing in retrospect relatively shallow, a characteristically late-Victorian attempt to combine scientific systematics with teleological design. Though often accused by his critics in his own time and since of being a preacher rather than a playwright (an accusation he took to himself with pride as a badge of honour), Shaw had a highly developed sense of theatricality, a capacity for genially inventive comic characterisation, and a stage language of operatic virtuosity. If many of his fifty-two plays have dropped out of the repertory, some dozen works continue to be regularly and successfully revived as classics of world theatre. His academic reputation as a writer has not kept pace with that of his modernist contemporaries Yeats and Joyce (qv). But Bernard Shaw, who made himself

a larger-than-life persona in his ninety-four years, probably lives on in name and image with a wider public than any other twentieth-century writer in English.

Sources

Bernard Shaw, *Collected plays with their prefaces* (7 vols, 1970–74); idem, *Collected letters*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (4 vols, 1972–88); Dan H. Laurence, *Bernard Shaw: a bibliography* (2 vols, 1983); Bernard Shaw, *The diaries*, ed. Stanley Weintraub (2 vols, 1986); Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw* (5 vols, 1988–92); Dan H. Laurence, 'The Shaws and the Gurlys: a genealogical study', *SHAW: the Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, xviii (1998), 1–31; A. M. Gibbs, *A Bernard Shaw chronology and who's who* (2000)

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Oscar & Pygmalion

In 1925, Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, with the Nobel Prize Committee recognizing him "*for his work which is marked by both idealism and humanity, its stimulating satire often being infused with a singular poetic beauty*". Shaw accepted the award but donated the prize money to fund translations (via *National Gallery of Ireland*).

Shaw's most recognized work is his 1912 play *Pygmalion*, which depicts the story of a flower-seller, Eliza Doolittle, who accepts elocution lessons from Professor Henry Higgins; **the play was adapted into a movie in 1938, starring Leslie Howard and Wendy Hiller**. The movie adaptation of *Pygmalion* was highly praised, receiving four Academy Award nominations, and Shaw won for Best Adapted Screenplay (via *Oscars*).

Shaw was controversially upset about the recognition and, according to *The Week*, stated "*It's perfect nonsense! To offer me an award of this sort is an insult, as if they had never heard of me before — and it's very likely they never had.*" Despite his statements, his Oscar was later placed in the Shaw's Corner Museum in England. George Bernard Shaw became the only person to win an Oscar and a Nobel Prize until 2016, when singer, Bob Dylan, who won the Oscar for Best Original Song in 2001, received a Nobel Prize for Literature.

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Films / Movies

[01] PYGMALION (1938) - Full Movie – Captioned
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmdPj_XbF30 [1:36:02]

[02] Major Barbara - Full Movie - GREAT QUALITY (1941)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_vaAz0SplY [1:55:44]

Major Barbara is a 1941 British comedy film starring Wendy Hiller and Rex Harrison. The film was produced and directed by Gabriel Pascal and edited by David Lean. It was adapted for the screen by Marjorie Deans and Anatole de Grunwald, based on the 1905 stage play Major Barbara by George Bernard Shaw. It was both a critical and financial success.

PLOT

The daughter of rich weapons manufacturer Andrew Undershaft (Robert Morley), idealistic young Barbara (Wendy Hiller) rebels against her estranged father by joining the Salvation Army. Wooed by professor-turned-preacher Adolphus Cusins (Rex Harrison), Barbara eventually grows disillusioned with her causes and begins to see things from her father's perspective. Based on the play by George Bernard Shaw, the film's comedic social commentary pulls no punches.

[03] *Saint Joan* - 1957 - Jean Seberg - Bernard Shaw - Full Classic Movie
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArsyzOCXR2w [1:46:06]

[04] Arms and the Man, by George Bernard Shaw
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8sV8VIbo3s [1:44:33]

[05] The Millionairess - Maggie Smith - James Villiers - George Bernard Shaw 1972
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_JkHD1s0Nc [1:40:15]

[06] PYGMALION - Peter O'toole - Margot Kidder - George Bernard Shaw – 1983
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGTcZmb1YSI [1:48:58]

Videos

[01] Pygmalion: G B Shaw
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upsWyI-eMy [28:22]

[02] G. B. Shaw / Works of G.B. Shaw / UGC-NET English I
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyfQpjhoRiI [37:26]

[03] On George Bernard Shaw - Irish Literature | Bright Side of The Road
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLyljfX8FKI [25:38]
Watch this fascinating short film if you wish to know more about Ireland's great Iconic Playwright George Bernard Shaw! Eoin O'Callaghan, a leading member of 'The Shaw Society (UK)', and the great Shawvian actor, Alan Cox, are seen here in conversation with Portobello Radio's presenter Piers Thompson, along with the ICC's Cultural Director Rosalind Scanlon – together they discus Shaw, his life and his works.

This film contains a real Literary Treat - watch to see Alan Cox recite passages from two of Shaw's greatest plays. Cox recites the characters of Don Juan and the Devil in Shaw's play "Man and Superman" - and he recites a touching scene from Shaw's great play "Pygmalion", (which 'My Fair Lady' was based on): See Alan reciting the parts of both Eliza Doolittle and Professor Henry Higgins!

This film was captured at a recent recording of the ICC's Irish arts radio show "Bright Side Of The Road" broadcast on Portobello Radio; to hear any of the previous episodes go to our Irish Cultural Centre Mixcloud.

This film is being released in advance of the touring production of Shaw's magnificent play "Mrs Warren's Profession", which is being produced in association with The Shaw Society. To find out more about the production of Mrs Warren's Profession, or to find out more about The Shaw Society and how to join go to shawsociety.org.uk.

[04]George Bernard Shaw <::> Documentary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHoGCLdrHMY [24:44]

George Bernard Shaw (26 July 1856 – 2 November 1950), known at his insistence simply as Bernard Shaw, was an Irish playwright, critic, polemicist and political activist. His influence on Western theatre, culture and politics extended from the 1880s to his death and beyond. He wrote more than sixty plays, including major works such as Man and Superman (1902), Pygmalion (1912) and Saint Joan (1923). With a range incorporating both contemporary satire and historical allegory, Shaw became the leading dramatist of his generation, and in 1925 was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

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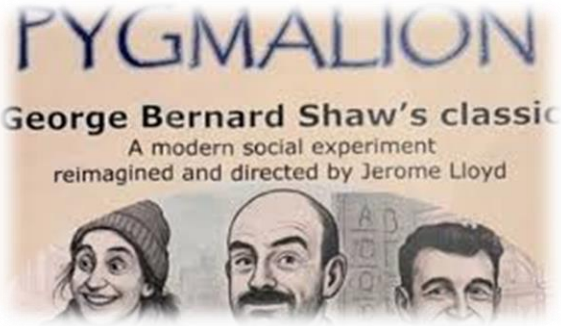

7 Feb 1885

10 Jan 1951

Sinclair Lewis

Nobel Prize in Literature 1930

Born: 7 February 1885, Sauk Centre, MN, USA
Died: 10 January 1951, Rome, Italy
Residence at the time of the award: USA
Prize motivation:

"for his vigorous and graphic art of description and his ability to create, with wit and humour, new types of characters"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1930/lewis/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize in
Literature 1930, by Henrik Schück

Links to other sites

[01] On Sinclair Lewis from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] Sinclair Lewis Foundation
[03] On Sinclair Lewis from Minnesota Digital Library

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Erik Axel Karlfeldt,
Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, on December 10, 1930

This year's winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature is a native of a part of America which for a long time has had Swedish contacts. He was born at Sauk Centre, a place of about two or three thousand inhabitants in the great cornland of Minnesota. He describes the place in his novel *Main Street* (1920), though there it is called Gopher Prairie.

It is the great prairie, an undulating land with lakes and oak groves, which has produced that little town and many others exactly like it. The pioneers have need of places to sell their grain, shops to purchase their supplies, banks for their mortgage loans, doctors for their bodies, and clergymen for their souls. There is cooperation between the country and the town, but at the same time there is conflict. Does the town exist for the sake of the country, or the country for the town?

The prairie makes its power felt. During the winters, long and cold as ours, terrific storms dump their snow in the wide streets, between low and shabby houses. The summer scorches with an intense heat and the town smells, because it lacks both sewers and street cleaning. Yet the town naturally feels its superiority; it is the flower of the prairie. It has the economic threads in its hands, and it is the focus of civilization – a concentrated, proud America amidst these earth-bound thralls of foreign origin, Germans and Scandinavians.

Thus, the town lives happily in its self-confidence and its belief in true democracy, which does not exclude a proper stratification of the people, its faith in a sound business morality, and the blessings of being motorized; for there are many Fords in Main Street.

To this town comes a young woman filled with rebellious emotions. She wants to reform the town, inside and out, but fails completely, almost going under in the attempt.

As a description of life in a small town, *Main Street* is certainly one of the best ever written. To be sure, the town is first and foremost American, but it could, as a spiritual milieu, be situated just as well in Europe. Like Mr. Lewis, many of us have suffered from its ugliness and bigotry. The strong satire has aroused local protests, but one need not be keensighted to see the tolerant strain in Lewis's sketch of his native town and its people.

Behind the puffed-up complacency of Gopher Prairie, however, lurks jealousy. At the edge of the plain stand cities like St. Paul and Minneapolis, already little metropolitan

centres with their skyscraper windows gleaming in the sunlight or the evening's electricity. Gopher Prairie wants to be like them and finds the time ripe for a campaign of progress, based on the rising war price of wheat.

A stump orator is imported, a real rabble-rouser of the peppiest kind, and with blatant eloquence he demonstrates that nothing will be easier than for Gopher Prairie to take the lead and reach the 200,000 class.

Mr. Babbitt – George Follansbee Babbitt – is the happy citizen of such a city (*Babbitt*, 1922). It is called Zenith, but probably it cannot be found on the map under that name. This city with its enlarged horizons hereafter becomes the starting point for Mr. Lewis's critical raids into the territories of Americanism. The city is a hundred times larger than Gopher Prairie and, therefore, a hundred times richer in one hundred per cent Americanism and one hundred times as satisfied with itself, and the enchantment of its optimism and progressive spirit is embodied in George F. Babbitt.

As a matter of fact, Babbitt probably approaches the ideal of an American popular hero of the middle class. The relativity of business morals as well as private rules of conduct is for him an accepted article of faith, and without hesitation he considers it God's purpose that man should work, increase his income, and enjoy modern improvements. He feels that he obeys these commandments and therefore lives in complete harmony with himself and society.

His profession, real estate, is the highest in existence, and his house near the city, with its trees and lawn, is standard, inside and out. The make of his car corresponds to his position, and in it he whizzes through the streets, proud as a young hero amidst the perils of the traffic. His family life also corresponds to the bourgeois average. His wife has become used to his masculine rumblings at home, and the children are impertinent, but that is what one expects.

He enjoys excellent health, is well-fed and thriving, alert and good-natured. His daily lunches at the club are feasts of instructive business conversation and stimulating anecdotes; he is sociable and winning. Babbitt is furthermore a man with the gift of speech. He has learned all the national slogans and whirls them about with his flowing tongue in his popular talks before clubs and mass meetings. Not even for the most elevated spirituality does he lack sympathy. He basks in the company of the noted poet, Cholmondeley Frink, who concentrates his genius on the composition of striking, rhymed advertisements for various firms and thereby earns a good annual income.

Thus Babbitt lives the life of the irreproachable citizen conscious of his respectability. But the jealousy of the gods broods over a mortal whose happiness grows too great. A soul such as Babbitt's is, of course, incapable of growth; it is a ready-made article from the start. Then Babbitt discovers that he has tendencies toward vice which he has neglected – although not wholly, one ought to add. As he approaches fifty, he

hastens to make up for the neglect. He enters into an irregular relationship and joins a frivolous gang of youths, in which he plays the role of a generous sugar daddy. But his deeds find him out. His lunches at the club become more and more painful through the silence and aloofness of his friends. They hint that he is spoiling this chance of future membership in the committee of progress. Here it is naturally New York and Chicago that loom before him. He succeeds in recovering his better self, and it is edifying to see him kneel in his pastor's study, where he receives absolution. And then Babbitt can once more devote himself to the Sunday school and other socially useful activities. His story ends as it began.

That it is institutions as representatives of false ideas, and not individuals, that Mr. Lewis wants to attack with his satire, he has himself indicated. It is then a triumph for his art, a triumph almost unique in literature, that he has been able to make this Babbitt, who fatalistically lives within the borders of an earth-bound but at the same time pompous utilitarianism, an almost lovable individual.

Babbitt is naive, and a believer who speaks up for his faith. At bottom there is nothing wrong with the man, and he is so festively refreshing that he almost serves as a recommendation for American snap and vitality. There are bouncers and Philistines in all countries, and one can only wish that half of them were half as amusing as Babbitt.

To the splendour of the figure, as well as to other speaking characters in the book, Mr. Lewis has added his unparalleled gift of words. Listen, for example, to the conversation of a few commercial travellers, sitting together in a compartment of the New York express. An unsuspected halo falls over the profession of selling. «To them, the Romantic Hero was no longer the knight, the wandering poet, the cowpuncher, the aviator, nor the brave young district attorney, but the great sales manager, who had an Analysis of Merchandizing Problems on his glass-topped desk, whose title of nobility was ‹Go-getter› and who devoted himself and all his young samurai to the cosmic purpose of Selling – not of selling anything in particular, for or to anybody in particular, but pure Selling.»

Arrowsmith (1925) is a work of a more serious nature. Lewis has there attempted to represent the medical profession and science in all its manifestations. As is well known, American research in the natural sciences, physics, chemistry, and medicine ranks with the best of our age, and it has several times been recognized as such from this very platform. Tremendous resources have been placed at its command. Richly endowed institutions work unceasingly on its development.

That even here some speculative persons want to take advantage of their opportunities may be regarded as inevitable. Private industries are on the alert for scientific discoveries and want to profit from them before they have been tested and finally established. The bacteriologist, for instance, searches with infinite care for vaccines to cure widespread diseases, and the manufacturing chemist wants to snatch them prematurely from his hand for mass production.

Under the guidance of a gifted and conscientious teacher, Martin Arrowsmith develops into one of the idealists of science. The tragedy of his life as research worker is that, after making an important discovery, he delays its announcement for constantly renewed tests until he is anticipated by a Frenchman in the Pasteur Institute.

The book contains a rich gallery of different medical types. We have the hum of the medical schools with their quarrelling and intriguing professors. Then there is the unpretentious country doctor, recalled from *Main Street*, who regards it as an honour to merge with his clientele and become their support and solace. Then we have the shrewd organizer of public health and general welfare, who works himself into popular favour and political power. Next we have the large institutes with their apparently royally independent investigators, under a management which to a certain extent must take into consideration the commercial interests of the donors and drive the staff to forced work for the honour of the institutes.

Above these types rises Arrowsmith's teacher, the exiled German Jew, Gottlieb, who is drawn with a warmth and admiration that seem to suggest a living model. He is an incorruptibly honest servant of science, but at the same time a resentful anarchist and a stand-offish misanthrope, who doubts whether the humanity whose benefactor he is amounts to as much as the animals he kills with his experiments. Further we meet the Swedish doctor, Gustaf Sondelius, a radiant Titan, who with singing and courage pursues pests in their lairs throughout the world, exterminates poisonous rats and burns infected villages, drinks and preaches his gospel that hygiene is destined to kill the medical art.

Alongside all of this runs the personal history of Martin Arrowsmith. Lewis is much too clever to make his characters without blemish, and Martin suffers from faults which at times seem obstructive to his development, both as a man and as a scientist. As a restless and irresolute young man he gets his best help from a little woman he encountered at a hospital where she was an insignificant nurse. When he begins to drift about the country as an unsuccessful medical student, he looks her up in a little village in the Far West, and there she becomes his wife. She is a devoted and simple soul, who demands nothing and who patiently waits in her solitude when, bewitched by the siren of science, her husband loses himself in the labyrinths of his work.

Later she accompanies him and Sondelius to the plague-infected island where Arrowsmith wants to test his serum. Her death in the abandoned hut, while her husband listens distractedly to another and more earthy siren than that of science, seems like a poetically crowning final act to a life of primitive self-sacrificing femininity.

The book is full of admirable learning, certified by experts as being accurate. Though a master of light-winged words, Lewis is never superficial when it comes to the foundations of his art. His study of details is always as careful and thorough as that of such a scientist as Arrowsmith or Gottlieb. In this work he has built a monument to

the profession of his own father, that of the physician, which certainly is not represented by a charlatan or a faker.

His big novel *Elmer Gantry* (1927) is like a surgical operation on one of the most delicate parts of the social body. Presumably it would not pay to search anywhere in the world for the old Puritanical virtues, but possibly one might find in some of the oldest corners of America a remnant of the sect which regarded it as a sin to remarry, once it had pleased God to make one a widower or widow, and wicked to lend money at interest. But otherwise America has no doubt had to moderate its religious rigidity. To what extent a pulpiteer like Elmer Gantry is common over there, we cannot here have the slightest idea. Neither his slapdash style of preaching with his cocky pugilistic manners («Hello, Mr. Devil») nor his successful collecting of money and men inside the gates of the church can hide the sad fact that he is an unusually foul fish. Mr. Lewis has been neither willing nor able to give him any attractive traits. But as description the book is a feat of strength, genuine and powerful, and its full-flavoured, sombre satire has a devastating effect. It is unnecessary to point out that hypocrisy thrives a little everywhere and that any one who attacks it at such a close range places himself before a hydra with many dangerous heads.

Sinclair Lewis's latest work is called *Dodsworth* (1929). In his books we have previously caught glimpses of the family as one of the most aristocratic in Zenith – a circle where no Babbitt ever gains admission. «Most aristocratic» probably often means in America «richest», but Sam Dodsworth is both aristocratic and rich. Even after 300 years he notices the English blood in his veins and wants to know the land of his ancestors. He is an American, but not a jingo. With him travels his wife, Fran. She is already over forty, while he is fifty. She is a cool beauty, «virginal as the winter wind», though she has grown children. In the European atmosphere she blossoms as a brilliant flower of luxury, revelling in vanity, pleasure, and selfishness. She goes so far that the quiet man who loves her has to leave her to her fate.

Once alone he meditates on the problem «Europe-America», and as a real business man he wants to clear up his accounts with both. He thinks of many things, honestly and without prejudice. One of his observations is that the very soil of Europe has some of the old-time quiet, which is scorned by America, the land of restless record-hunters. But America is the land of youth and daring experiments. And when he returns there, we understand that the heart of Sinclair Lewis follows him.

Yes, Sinclair Lewis is an American. He writes the new language – American – as one of the representatives of 120,000,000 souls. He asks us to consider that this nation is not yet finished or melted down; that it is still in the turbulent years of adolescence.

The new great American literature has started with national self-criticism. It is a sign of health. Sinclair Lewis has the blessed gift of wielding his landclearing implement not only with a firm hand but with a smile on his lips and youth in his heart. He has the manners of a new settler, who takes new land into cultivation. He is a pioneer.

Mr. Sinclair Lewis – I have spoken of you to this assembly in a language which you do not understand. I might have abused the occasion to speak ill of you. I have not done it. I have spoken of you as one of the strong, young chieftains of the great new American literature. Besides, you have a special recommendation to Swedish hearts. You were born among our countrymen in America, and you have mentioned them in friendly terms in your renowned books. We are glad to see you here today and glad that our nation has a laurel of its own to bestow on you. And now I ask you to descend with me and receive it from the hand of our King.

At the banquet, Tor Hedberg, Member of the Swedish Academy, addressed the laureate:

«Finally, Mr. Lewis, in your person we greet that [American] new building on its own American ground. It has been said that the Nobel Prize in Literature has found its way across the Atlantic far too late. If so, it has not been due to any indifference on the part of the Swedish Academy, nor to any lack of knowledge, but rather to an «embarras de richesse». It has further been said that the award of a prize to your work, in which the follies of mankind – not excluding those that are perhaps special to America – have been scourged, is an expression of some kind of European or Swedish animosity against America. I dare to assert that this is a complete mistake. It is with living humour that you aim the blows of your scourge, and where there is humour, there is a heart too. It is not only the keen and lively intellect, the masterly design of human shapes and characters but also the warm, open, gaily-beating heart that we have appreciated in you». Sinclair Lewis expressed his gratitude and declared that he felt closely related to the Swedish people because of his many acquaintances among the Swedish families of Minnesota. He said that the Nobel Prize had a great significance for him, that it had in fact created a new standard which implied an obligation to improve on what he had done so far. Furthermore, he considered it a high honour to have been awarded the Nobel Prize along with the renowned scholars who received the distinction. He said that, personally, he had the profoundest respect for the integrity of the scientist, and thought that a man of letters, himself included, should strive for the same integrity.

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Nobel Prize Lecture

Presentation Speech

Nobel Lecture, December 12, 1930

The American Fear of Literature

Were I to express my feeling of honor and pleasure in having been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, I should be fulsome and perhaps tedious, and I present my gratitude with a plain «Thank you».

I wish, in this address, to consider certain trends, certain dangers, and certain high and exciting promises in present-day American literature. To discuss this with complete and unguarded frankness – and I should not insult you by being otherwise than completely honest, however indiscreet – it will be necessary for me to be a little impolite regarding certain institutions and persons of my own greatly beloved land.

But I beg of you to believe that I am in no case gratifying a grudge. Fortune has dealt with me rather too well. I have known little struggle, not much poverty, many generosities. Now and then I have, for my books or myself, been somewhat warmly denounced – there was one good pastor in California who upon reading my *Elmer Gantry* desired to lead a mob and lynch me, while another holy man in the state of Maine wondered if there was no respectable and righteous way of putting me in jail. And, much harder to endure than any raging condemnation, a certain number of old acquaintances among journalists, what in the galloping American slang we call the «I Knew Him When Club », have scribbled that since they know me personally, therefore I must be a rather low sort of fellow and certainly no writer. But if I have now and then received such cheering brickbats, still I, who have heaved a good many bricks myself, would be fatuous not to expect a fair number in return.

No, I have for myself no conceivable complaint to make, and yet for American literature in general, and its standing in a country where industrialism and finance and science flourish and the only arts that are vital and respected are architecture and the film, I have a considerable complaint.

I can illustrate by an incident which chances to concern the Swedish Academy and myself and which happened a few days ago, just before I took the ship at New York for Sweden. There is in America a learned and most amiable old gentleman who has been a pastor, a university professor, and a diplomat. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and

Letters and no few universities have honored him with degrees. As a writer he is chiefly known for his pleasant little essays on the joy of fishing. I do not Suppose that professional fishermen, whose lives depend on the run of cod or herring, find it altogether an amusing occupation, but from these essays I learned, as a boy, that there is something very important and spiritual about catching fish, if you have no need of doing so.

This scholar stated, and publicly, that in awarding the Nobel Prize to a person who has scoffed at American institutions as much as I have, the Nobel Committee and the Swedish Academy had insulted America. I don't know whether, as an ex-diplomat, he intends to have an international incident made of it, and perhaps demand of the American Government that they land Marines in Stockholm to protect American literary rights, but I hope not.

I should have supposed that to a man so learned as to have been made a Doctor of Divinity, a Doctor of Letters, and I do not know how many other imposing magnificences, the matter would have seemed different; I should have supposed that he would have reasoned, «Although personally I dislike this man's books, nevertheless the Swedish Academy has in choosing him honored America by assuming that the Americans are no longer a puerile backwoods clan, so inferior that they are afraid of criticism, but instead a nation come of age and able to consider calmly and maturely any dissection of their land, however scoffing.»

I should even have supposed that so international a scholar would have believed that Scandinavia, accustomed to the works of Strindberg, Ibsen, and Pontoppidan, would not have been peculiarly shocked by a writer whose most anarchistic assertion has been that America, with all her wealth and power, has not yet produced a civilization good enough to satisfy the deepest wants of human creatures. I believe that Strindberg rarely sang the «Star-Spangled Banner» or addressed Rotary Clubs, yet Sweden seems to have survived him.

I have at such length discussed this criticism of the learned fisherman not because it has any conceivable importance in itself, but because it does illustrate the fact that in America most of us – not readers alone but even writers – are still afraid of any literature which is not a glorification of everything American, a glorification of our faults as well as our virtues. To be not only a best seller in America but to be really beloved, a novelist must assert that all American men are tall, handsome, rich, honest, and powerful at golf; that all country towns are filled with neighbors who do nothing from day to day save go about being kind to one another; that although American girls may be wild, they change always into perfect wives and mothers; and that, geographically, America is composed solely of New York, which is inhabited entirely by millionaires; of the West, which keeps

unchanged all the boisterous heroism of 1870; and of the South, where everyone lives on a plantation perpetually glossy with moonlight and scented with magnolias.

It is not today vastly more true than it was twenty years ago that such novelists of ours as you have read in Sweden, novelists like Dreiser and Willa Cather, are authentically popular and influential in America. As it was revealed by the venerable fishing Academician whom I have quoted, we still most revere the writers for the popular magazines who in a hearty and edifying chorus chant that the America of a hundred and twenty million population is still as simple, as pastoral, as it was when it had but forty million; that in an industrial plant with ten thousand employees, the relationship between the worker and the manager is still as neighborly and uncomplex as in a factory of 1840, with five employees; that the relationships between father and son, between husband and wife, are precisely the same in an apartment in a thirty-story palace today, with three motor cars awaiting the family below and five books on the library shelves and a divorce imminent in the family next week, as were those relationships in a rose-veiled five-room cottage in 1880; that, in fine, America has gone through the revolutionary change from rustic colony to world empire without having in the least altered the bucolic and Puritanic simplicity of Uncle Sam.

I am, actually, extremely grateful to the fishing Academician for having somewhat condemned me. For since he is a leading member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he has released me, has given me the right to speak as frankly of that Academy as he has spoken of me. And in any honest study of American intellectualism today, that curious institution must be considered.

Before I consider the Academy, however, let me sketch a fantasy which has pleased me the last few days in the unavoidable idleness of a rough trip on the Atlantic. I am sure that you know, by now, that the award to me of the Nobel Prize has by no means been altogether popular in America. Doubtless the experience is not new to you. I fancy that when you gave the award even to Thomas Mann, whose *Zauberberg* seems to me to contain the whole of intellectual Europe, even when you gave it to *Kipling*, whose social significance is so profound that it has been rather authoritatively said that he created the British Empire, even when you gave it to Bernard Shaw, there were countrymen to those authors who complained because you did not choose another. And I imagined what would have been said had you chosen some American other than myself. Suppose you had taken Theodore Dreiser.

Now to me, as to many other American writers, Dreiser more than any other man, marching alone, usually unappreciated, often hated, has cleared the trail from Victorian and Howellsian timidity and gentility in American fiction to honesty and boldness and passion of life. Without his pioneering, I doubt if any of us could, unless we liked to be sent to jail, seek to express life and beauty and terror.

My great colleague Sherwood Anderson has proclaimed this leadership of Dreiser. I am delighted to join him. Dreiser's great first novel, *Sister Carrie*, which he dared to publish thirty long years ago and which I read twenty-five years ago, came to housebound and airless America like a great free Western wind, and to our stuffy domesticity gave us the first fresh air since Mark Twain and Whitman.

Yet had you given the Prize to Mr. Dreiser, you would have heard groans from America; you would have heard that his style – I am not exactly sure what this mystic quality «style» may be, but I find the word so often in the writings of minor critics that I suppose it must exist – you would have heard that his style is cumbersome, that his choice of words is insensitive, that his books are interminable. And certainly respectable scholars would complain that in Mr. Dreiser's world, men and women are often sinful and tragic and despairing, instead of being forever sunny and full of song and virtue, as befits authentic Americans.

And had you chosen Mr. Eugene O'Neill, who has done nothing much in American drama save to transform it utterly, in ten or twelve years, from a false world of neat and competent trickery to a world of splendor and fear and greatness, you would have been reminded that he has done something far worse than scoffing – he has seen life as not to be neatly arranged in the study of a scholar but as a terrifying, magnificent, and often quite horrible thing akin to the tornado, the earthquake, the devastating fire.

And had you given Mr. James Branch Cabell the Prize, you would have been told that he is too fantastically malicious. So would you have been told that Miss Willa Cather, for all the homely virtue of her novels concerning the peasants of Nebraska, has in her novel, *The Lost Lady*, been so untrue to America's patent and perpetual and possibly tedious virtuousness as to picture an abandoned woman who remains, nevertheless, uncannily charming even to the virtuous, in a story without any moral; that Mr. Henry Mencken is the worst of all scoffers; that Mr. Sherwood Anderson viciously errs in considering sex as important a force in life as fishing; that Mr. Upton Sinclair, being a Socialist, sins against the perfectness of American capitalistic mass production; that Mr. Joseph Hergesheimer is un-American in regarding graciousness of manner and beauty of surface as of some importance in the endurance of daily life; and that Mr. Ernest Hemingway is not only too young but, far worse, uses language which should be unknown

to gentlemen; that he acknowledges drunkenness as one of man's eternal ways to happiness, and asserts that a soldier may find love more significant than the hearty slaughter of men in battle.

Yes, they are wicked, these colleagues of mine; you would have done almost as evilly to have chosen them as to have chosen me; and as a chauvinistic American – only, mind you, as an American of 1930 and not of 1880 – I rejoice that they are my countrymen and countrywomen, and that I may speak of them with pride even in the Europe of Thomas Mann, H. G. Wells, Galsworthy, Knut Hamsun, Arnold Bennett, Feuchtwanger, Selma Lagerlöf, Sigrid Undset, Verner von Heidenstam, D'Annunzio, Romain Rolland.
It is my fate in this paper to swing constantly from optimism to pessimism and back, but so is it the fate of anyone who writes or speaks of anything in America – the most contradictory, the most depressing, the most stirring, of any land in the world today.

Thus, having with no muted pride called the roll of what seem to me to be great men and women in American literary life today, and having indeed omitted a dozen other names of which I should like to boast were there time, I must turn again and assert that in our contemporary American literature, indeed in all American arts save architecture and the film, we – yes, we who have such pregnant and vigorous standards in commerce and science – have no standards, no healing communication, no heroes to be followed nor villains to be condemned, no certain ways to be pursued, and no dangerous paths to be avoided.

The American novelist or poet or dramatist or sculptor or painter must work alone, in confusion, unassisted save by his own integrity.

That, of course, has always been the lot of the artist. The vagabond and criminal François Villon had certainly no smug and comfortable refuge in which elegant ladies would hold his hand and comfort his starveling soul and more starved body. He, veritably a great man, destined to outlive in history all the dukes and puissant cardinals whose robes he was esteemed unworthy to touch, had for his lot the gutter and the hardened crust.

Such poverty is not for the artist in America. They pay us, indeed, only too well; that writer is a failure who cannot have his butler and motor and his villa at Palm Beach, where he is permitted to mingle almost in equality with the barons of banking. But he is oppressed ever by something worse than poverty – by the feeling that what he creates does not matter, that he is expected by his readers to be only a decorator or a clown, or that he is good-naturedly accepted as a scoffer whose bark probably is worse than his bite and who probably is a good fellow at heart, who in any case

certainly does not count in a land that produces eighty-story buildings, motors by the million, and wheat by the billions of bushels. And he has no institution, no group, to which he can turn for inspiration, whose criticism he can accept and whose praise will be precious to him.

What institutions have we?

The American Academy of Arts and Letters does contain, along with several excellent painters and architects and statesmen, such a really distinguished university president as Nicholas Murray Butler, so admirable and courageous a scholar as Wilbur Cross, and several first-rate writers: the poets Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost, the free-minded publicist James Truslow Adams, and the novelists Edith Wharton, Hamlin Garland, Owen Wister, Brand Whitlock, and Booth Tarkington.

But it does not include Theodore Dreiser, Henry Mencken, our most vivid critic, George Jean Nathan, who, though still young, is certainly the dean of our dramatic critics, Eugene O'Neill, incomparably our best dramatist, the really original and vital poets, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Carl Sandburg, Robinson Jeffers and Vachel Lindsay and Edgar Lee Masters, whose *Spoon River Anthology* was so utterly different from any other poetry ever published, so fresh, so authoritative, so free from any gropings and timidities that it came like a revelation and created a new school of native American poetry. It does not include the novelists and short-story writers, Willa Cather, Joseph Hergesheimer, Sherwood Anderson, Ring Lardner, Ernest Hemingway, Louis Bromfield, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Fannie Hurst, Mary Austin, James Branch Cabell, Edna Ferber, nor Upton Sinclair, of whom you must say, whether you admire or detest his aggressive socialism, that he is internationally better known than any other American artist whosoever, be he novelist, poet, painter, sculptor, musician, architect.

I should not expect any Academy to be so fortunate as to contain all these writers, but one which fails to contain any of them, which thus cuts itself off from so much of what is living and vigorous and original in American letters, can have no relationship whatever to our life and aspirations. It does not represent the literary America of today – it represents only Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

It might be answered that, after all, the Academy is limited to fifty members; that, naturally, it cannot include every one of merit. But the fact is that while most of our few giants are excluded, the Academy does have room to include three extraordinarily bad poets, two very melodramatic and insignificant playwrights, two gentlemen who are known only because they are university presidents, a man who was thirty years ago known as a

rather clever, humorous draughtsman, and several gentlemen of whom – I sadly confess my ignorance – I have never heard.

Let me again emphasize the fact – for it is a fact – that I am not attacking the American Academy. It is a hospitable and generous and decidedly dignified institution. And it is not altogether the Academy's fault that it does not contain many of the men who have significance in our letters. Sometimes it is the fault of those writers themselves. I cannot imagine that grizzly bear Theodore Dreiser being comfortable at the serenely Athenian dinners of the Academy, and were they to invite Mencken, he would infuriate them with his boisterous jeering. No, I am not attacking – I am reluctantly considering the Academy because it is so perfect an example of the divorce in America of intellectual life from all authentic standards of importance and reality.

Our universities and colleges, or gymnasia, most of them, exhibit the same unfortunate divorce. I can think of four of them, Rollins College in Florida, Middlebury College in Vermont, the University of Michigan, and the University of Chicago – which has had on its roll so excellent a novelist as Robert Herrick, so courageous a critic as Robert Morss Lovett – which have shown an authentic interest in contemporary creative literature. Four of them. But universities and colleges and musical emporiums and schools for the teaching of theology and plumbing and signpainting are as thick in America as the motor traffic. Whenever you see a public building with Gothic fenestration on a sturdy backing of Indiana concrete, you may be certain that it is another university, with anywhere from two hundred to twenty thousand students equally ardent about avoiding the disadvantage of becoming learned and about gaining the social prestige contained in the possession of a B.A degree.

Oh, socially our universities are close to the mass of our citizens, and so are they in the matter of athletics. A great college football game is passionately witnessed by eighty thousand people, who have paid five dollars apiece and motored anywhere from ten to a thousand miles for the ecstasy of watching twenty-two men chase one another up and down a curiously marked field. During the football season, a capable player ranks very nearly with our greatest and most admired heroes – even with Henry Ford, President Hoover, and Colonel Lindbergh.

And in one branch of learning, the sciences, the lords of business who rule us are willing to do homage to the devotees of learning. However bleakly one of our trader aristocrats may frown upon poetry or the visions of a painter, he is graciously pleased to endure a Millikan, a Michelson, a Banting, a Theobald Smith.

But the paradox is that in the arts our universities are as cloistered, as far from reality and living creation, as socially and athletically and scientifically they are close to us. To a true-blue professor of literature in an American university, literature is not something that a plain human being, living today, painfully sits down to produce. No; it is something dead; it is something magically produced by superhuman beings who must, if they are to be regarded as artists at all, have died at least one hundred years before the diabolical invention of the typewriter. To any authentic don, there is something slightly repulsive in the thought that literature could be created by any ordinary human being, still to be seen walking the streets, wearing quite commonplace trousers and coat and looking not so unlike a chauffeur or a farmer. Our American professors like their literature clear and cold and pure and very dead.

I do not suppose that American universities are alone in this. I am aware that to the dons of Oxford and Cambridge, it would seem rather indecent to suggest that Wells and Bennett and Galsworthy and George Moore may, while they commit the impropriety of continuing to live, be compared to anyone so beautifully and safely dead as Samuel Johnson. I suppose that in the universities of Sweden and France and Germany there exist plenty of professors who prefer dissection to understanding. But in the new and vital and experimental land of America, one would expect the teachers of literature to be less monastic, more human, than in the traditional shadows of old Europe.

They are not.

There has recently appeared in America, out of the universities, an astonishing circus called «the New Humanism.» Now of course «humanism» means so many things that it means nothing. It may infer anything from a belief that Greek and Latin are more inspiring than the dialect of contemporary peasants to a belief that any living peasant is more interesting than a dead Greek. But it is a delicate bit of justice that this nebulous word should have been chosen to label this nebulous cult.

Insofar as I have been able to comprehend them – for naturally in a world so exciting and promising as this today, a life brilliant with Zeppelins and Chinese revolutions and the Bolshevik industrialization of farming and ships and the Grand Canyon and young children and terrifying hunger and the lonely quest of scientists after God, no creative writer would have the time to follow all the chilly enthusiasms of the New Humanists – this newest of sects reasserts the dualism of man’s nature. It would confine literature to the fight between man’s soul and God, or man’s soul and evil.

But, curiously, neither God nor the devil may wear modern dress, but must retain Grecian vestments. Oedipus is a tragic figure for the New Humanists; man, trying to maintain himself as the image of God under the menace of dynamos, in a world of high-pressure salesmanship, is not. And the poor comfort which they offer is that the object of life is to develop self- discipline – whether or not one ever accomplishes anything with this self-discipline. So the whole movement results in the not particularly novel doctrine that both art and life must be resigned and negative. It is a doctrine of the blackest reaction introduced into a stirringly revolutionary world.

Strangely enough, this doctrine of death, this escape from the complexities and danger of living into the secure blankness of the monastery, has become widely popular among professors in a land where one would have expected only boldness and intellectual adventure, and it has more than ever shut creative writers off from any benign influence which might conceivably have come from the universities.

But it has always been so. America has never had a Brandes, a Taine, a Goethe, a Croce.

With a wealth of creative talent in America, our criticism has most of it been a chill and insignificant activity pursued by jealous spinsters, ex-baseball-reporters, and acid professors. Our Erasmuses have been village schoolmistresses. How should there be any standards when there has been no one capable of setting them up?

The great Cambridge-Concord circle of the middle of the nineteenth century – Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, the Alcotts – were sentimental reflections of Europe, and they left no school, no influence. Whitman and Thoreau and Poe and, in some degree, Hawthorne, were outcasts, men alone and despised, berated by the New Humanists of their generation. It was with the emergence of William Dean Howells that we first began to have something like a standard, and a very bad standard it was.

Mr. Howells was one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men, but he had the code of a pious old maid whose greatest delight was to have tea at the vicarage. He abhorred not only profanity and obscenity but all of what H. G. Wells has called «the jolly coarsenesses of life». In his fantastic vision of life, which he innocently conceived to be realistic, farmers, and seamen and factory hands might exist, but the farmer must never be covered with muck, the seaman must never roll out bawdy chanteys, the factory hand must be thankful to his good kind employer, and all of them must long for the opportunity to visit Florence and smile gently at the quaintness of the beggars.

So strongly did Howells feel this genteel, this New Humanistic philosophy that he was able vastly to influence his contemporaries, down even to 1914 and the turmoil of the Great War.

He was actually able to tame Mark Twain, perhaps the greatest of our writers, and to put that fiery old savage into an intellectual frock coat and top hat. His influence is not altogether gone today. He is still worshipped by Hamlin Garland, an author who should in every way have been greater than Howells but who under Howells' influence was changed from a harsh and magnificent realist into a genial and insignificant lecturer. Mr. Garland is, so far as we have one, the dean of American letters today, and as our dean, he is alarmed by all of the younger writers who are so lacking in taste as to suggest that men and women do not always love in accordance with the prayer-book, and that common people sometimes use language which would be inappropriate at a women's literary club on Main Street. Yet this same Hamlin Garland, as a young man, before he had gone to Boston and become cultured and Howellsised, wrote two most valiant and revelatory works of realism, *Main-Traveled Roads* and *Rose of Dutcher's Coolie*.

I read them as a boy in a prairie village in Minnesota just such an environment as was described in Mr. Garland's tales. They were vastly exciting to me. I had realized in reading Balzac and Dickens that it was possible to describe French and English common people as one actually saw them. But it had never occurred to me that one might without indecency write of the people of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, as one felt about them. Our fictional tradition, you see, was that all of us in Midwestern villages were altogether noble and happy; that not one of us would exchange the neighborly bliss of living on Main Street for the heathen gaudiness of New York or Paris or Stockholm. But in Mr. Garland's *Main-Traveled Roads* I discovered that there was one man who believed that Midwestern peasants were sometimes bewildered and hungry and vile – and heroic. And, given this vision, I was released; I could write of life as living life.

I am afraid that Mr. Garland would be not pleased but acutely annoyed to know that he made it possible for me to write of America as I see it, and not as Mr. William Dean Howells so sunnily saw it. And it is his tragedy, it is a completely revelatory American tragedy, that in our land of freedom, men like Garland, who first blast the roads to freedom, become themselves the most bound.

But, all this time, while men like Howells were so effusively seeking to guide America into becoming a pale edition of an English cathedral town, there were surly and authentic fellows – Whitman and Melville, then Dreiser and James Huneker and Mencken – who insisted that our land had something more than tea-table gentility.

And so, without standards, we have survived. And for the strong young men, it has perhaps been well that we should have no standards. For, after seeming to be pessimistic about my own and much beloved land, I want to close this dirge with a very lively sound of optimism.

I have, for the future of American literature, every hope and every eager belief. We are coming out, I believe, of the stuffiness of safe, sane, and incredibly dull provincialism. There are young Americans today who are doing such passionate and authentic work that it makes me sick to see that I am a little too old to be one of them.

There is Ernest Hemingway, a bitter youth, educated by the most intense experience, disciplined by his own high standards, an authentic artist whose home is in the whole of life; there is Thomas Wolfe, a child of, I believe, thirty or younger, whose one and only novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, is worthy to be compared with the best in our literary production, a Gargantuan creature with great gusto of life; there is Thornton Wilder, who in an age of realism dreams the old and lovely dreams of the eternal romantics; there is John Dos Passos, with his hatred of the safe and sane standards of Babbitt and his splendor of revolution; there is Stephen Benét, who to American drabness has restored the epic poem with his glorious memory of old John Brown; there are Michael Gold, who reveals the new frontier of the Jewish East Side, and William Faulkner, who has freed the South from hoopskirts; and there are a dozen other young poets and fictioneers, most of them living now in Paris, most of them a little insane in the tradition of James Joyce, who, however insane they may be, have refused to be genteel and traditional and dull.

I salute them, with a joy in being not yet too far removed from their determination to give to the America that has mountains and endless prairies, enormous cities and lost far cabins, billions of money and tons of faith, to an America that is as strange as Russia and as complex as China, a literature worthy of her vastness.

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Documentary

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1930/lewis/documentary/}

A short clip of Sinclair Lewis after he arrived in Stockholm for the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony held on 10 December 1930.

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Photo Gallery

See all photos

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1930/lewis/photo-gallery/

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Timeline

Sinclair Lewis lived from 1885 to 1951. The following is a timeline of significant events in his life.

- 1885 Born in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, to Dr. Edwin J. Lewis and Emma Kermott Lewis.
- 1891 Mother dies.
- 1892 Father marries Isabel Warner.
- 1902 Attends Oberlin Academy in Ohio.
- 1903-1906 Attends Yale University, serves as editor of Yale Literary Magazine, works on cattle boats during two summers.

- 1906 Works temporary jobs and spends a month doing odd jobs at Upton Sinclair's Helicon Hall.
- 1907-1908 Returns to Yale and graduates.
- 1908-1915 Travels the U.S., works in New York publishing houses, and writes poetry and short stories.
- 1912 Hike and the Aeroplane is published under the name Tom Graham.
- 1914 Marries Grace Hegger, and Our Mr. Wrenn: The Romantic Adventures of a Gentle Man is published.
- 1916 The Trail of the Hawk: A Comedy of the Seriousness of Life is published.
- 1917 The Job: An American Novel and The Innocents: A Story for Lovers are published. Son, Wells, is born.
- 1919 Free Air is published.
- 1920 Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott is published.
- 1922 Babbitt is published.
- 1925 Arrowsmith is published.
- 1926 Mantrap is published. Awarded Pulitzer Prize for Arrowsmith, but refuses it. Father dies.
- 1927 Elmer Gantry is published.
- 1928 The Man Who Knew Coolidge: Being the Soul of Lowell Schmaltz, Constructive and Nordic Citizen, is published. Divorces Grace Hegger, weds Dorothy Thompson.
- 1929 Dodsworth is published.
- 1930 Son, Michael, is born. Becomes first American awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1933 Ann Vickers is published.
- 1934 Work of Art is published. Assists Sidney Howard in adapting Dodsworth to the stage.
- 1935 It Can't Happen Here is published.
- 1937 Selected Short Stories of Sinclair Lewis is published.
- 1936-1942 Writes several plays, including Angela is Twenty-Two, acting in a few of them.
- 1938 The Prodigal Parents is published.
- 1940 Bethel Merriday is published. Teaches briefly at University of Wisconsin.

- 1942 Divorces Dorothy Thompson.
- 1943 Gideon Planish is published.
- 1944 Lt. Wells Lewis is killed by a sniper in Piedmont Valley, France, during WWII.
- 1945 Cass Timberlane is published.
- 1947 Kingsblood Royal is published.
- 1949 The God-Seeker is published.
- 1951 Dies in Rome of heart disease, buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Sauk Centre, Minnesota. World So Wide is published posthumously.

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Film Adaptations

This is a mostly complete list of film and television versions of Sinclair Lewis's novels, short stories, and plays. Visit the Sinclair Lewis listing at Internet Movie Database for a more thorough listing of most of the movies and mini series. The links on this page go to the IMDB page for the adaptation.

- Abysmal Brute (1923, based on a story sold to Jack London)
- Ann Vickers (1933)
- Arrowsmith (1931)
- Arrowsmith (1997, Czech mini series)
- Babbitt (1924)
- Babbitt (1934)
- Bongo (1947, based on a short story), part of Fun and Fancy Free
- Cass Timberlane (1947, based on a novel)
- Dodsworth (1936)
- Elmer Gantry (1960)
- Free Air (1922)
- Ghost Patrol (1923, based on a short story)
- Main Street (1923)
- I Married a Doctor (1936, based on Main Street)

- Mantrap (1926)
- Nature Incorporated (1916, based on a short story)
- Newly Rich (1931, based on the short story "Let's Play King") aka Forbidden Adventure
- This is the Life (1944, based on the play Angela is Twenty-Two)
- The Unpainted Woman (1919, based on a short story)
- Untamed (1940, based on Mantrap)

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The Sinclair Lewis Society

An Illinois State University site

{https://about.illinoisstate.edu/sinclairlewis/sinclair-lewis/}

Sinclair Lewis

Sinclair Lewis, the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, was born in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, in 1885. Although he was proud of his Midwestern roots, he traveled widely and was interested in many different aspects of American society, from business and medicine to religion and small town life. His concern with issues involving gender, race, and the powerless in society make his work still vital and pertinent today. As Sheldon Norman Grebstein wrote in his work Sinclair Lewis, Lewis "was the conscience of his generation and he could well serve as the conscience of our own. His analysis of the America of the 1920s holds true for the America of today. His prophecies have become our truths and his fears our most crucial problems." Sinclair Lewis was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for Main Street and Babbitt and won the award for Arrowsmith (although he turned it down). He was a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He died in Rome in 1951.

More detailed information is provided both on our timeline of Lewis's life and in the almanac of important dates. We invite you to test your Lewis knowledge with our quiz. For those with a sweet tooth, try your hand at making some of Lewis' favorite recipes. E-mail Sally Parry of the Sinclair Lewis Society and let her know how you like them!

NOTE: For MORE details/information, visit the cited Web Page!

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Sinclair Lewis Foundation

{https://www.sinclairlewisfoundation.org/about-sinclair-lewis}

SINCLAIR LEWIS, the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, was born in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, in 1885. Although he was proud of his Midwestern roots, he traveled widely and was interested in many different aspects of American society, from business and medicine to religion and small town life. His concern with issues involving women, race, and the powerless in society make his work still vital and pertinent today. As Sheldon Norman Grebstein wrote, Lewis "was the conscience of his generation and he could well serve as the conscience of our own. His analysis of the America of the 1920s holds true for the America of today. His prophecies have become our truths and his fears our most crucial problems." Sinclair Lewis was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for Main Street and Babbitt, and won the award for Arrowsmith (although he turned it down). He was a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He died in Rome in 1951. His cremated remains are buried in Sauk Centre, Minnesota.

Videos

[01] The Willow Walk (AUDIOBOOK FULL BOOK) - By Sinclair Lewis
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_HwJeKiM8k [1:25:01]

[02] "Main Street" by Sinclair Lewis | A Podcast Summary of Classic Novels
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1tvxyLyD7Q [40:35]

[03] Main Street by Sinclair Lewis · Audiobook preview
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbJuK9DMa2c [1:54:30]

[04] THINGS, a Short Story by Sinclair Lewis

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7XXE0wB_0g [1:20:14]

In a small, once-adventurous family, possessions became both a symbol of success and a prison. Theo Duke's world shifts from the wild laughter of childhood adventures with Stacy Lindstrom to the suffocating grandeur of her family's mansion—a house bursting with cloisonné, memories, and secrets. As ambition, love, and the shadows of war collide, Theo struggles to reclaim her identity amidst the weight of a legacy she didn't choose.

But when the peace bells toll, and a spark ignites more than just passion, the Dukes are faced with a fiery reckoning that will either consume them—or set them free. This is a story of desire, sacrifice, and the battle to break free from the gilded cage of "things."

[05] LET'S PLAY KING, a Short Story by Sinclair Lewis

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEp6aO_ue9A [2:42:21]

In Mechanicville, New York, Rabbit Tait—a flamboyant gas station proprietor with a ruby ring as big as his dreams—sits in front of his modest "Y Wurry Gas & Fixit Station," unaware that his life is about to change forever. His son Terry, an impossibly angelic child with golden hair and violet eyes, becomes the centerpiece of a far-fetched scheme to turn small-town grit into Hollywood gold. From gas pumps to glitzy limousines, Rabbit and his iron-willed wife, Bessie, navigate a madcap journey that catapults their cherubic son into the ruthless world of fame, fortune, and high society. But as Terry transforms from Mechanicville's cherub to a cinematic sensation, will the boy's fragile innocence survive the ambitions of his parents—and the relentless pull of the spotlight? Let's Play King is a satirical tale of ambition, absurdity, and the price of the American Dream, penned with biting wit and tender humor by Sinclair Lewis.

[06] "It Can't Happen Here" by Sinclair Lewis

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8ltKtmhgXc [54:54]

[07] City and Country: Sinclair Lewis's Views of America

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73WeoBD6V7Q [32:49]

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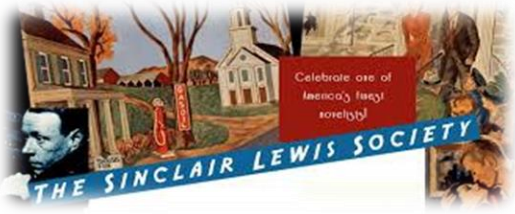

14 Aug 1867

31 Jan 1933

John Galsworthy

Nobel Prize in Literature 1932

Born: 14 August 1867, Kingston Hill, United Kingdom
Died: 31 January 1933, London, United Kingdom
Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom
Prize motivation:

"for his distinguished art of narration
which takes its highest
form in The Forsyte Saga"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1932/galsworthy/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1919, by Erik Axel Karlfeldt
- Literature 1920, by Henrik Schück
- Literature 1921, by Anders Österling
- Literature 1922, by Nobel Committee
- Literature 1931, by Martin Lamm
- Literature 1932, by Henrik Schück

Links to other sites

[01] On John Galsworthy from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] Spartacus Educational – John Galsworthy

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Anders Österling, Member of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy, on December 10, 1932

When we survey John Galsworthy's authorship, it seems to develop unusually smoothly, pushed on by a conscientious and indefatigable creative impulse. Yet he is not one of those who have turned to the literary career rapidly and without resistance. Born, as the English put it, with a silver spoon in his mouth, that is, economically independent, he studied at Harrow and Oxford, chose the law without practising it, and travelled all over the world. When, at the age of twenty-eight, he began writing for the first time, the immediate reason was the exhortation of a woman friend, and it was to Galsworthy a mere recreation, evidently not without the inherent prejudices of the gentleman, against the vocation of writing. His first two collections of tales were published under the pen name of John Sinjohn, and the editions were soon withdrawn by the self-critical beginner. Not until he was thirty-seven did he begin his real authorship by publishing the novel *The Island Pharisees* (1904), and two years later appeared *The Man of Property*, the origin of his fame and at the same time of his monumental chief work, *The Forsyte Saga*.

In Galsworthy's satire against the Island Pharisees, the fundamental feature that was to mark all his subsequent works was already apparent. The book deals with an English gentleman's having stayed abroad long enough to forget his conventional sphere of thoughts and feelings; he criticizes the national surroundings severely, and in doing so he is assisted by a Belgian vagabond, who casually makes his acquaintance in an English railway compartment and who becomes his fate. At that time Galsworthy was himself a cosmopolite returned home, prepared to fight against the old capitalistic aristocratic society with about the same program as Bernard Shaw, although the Englishman, contrary to the Irishman who fought with intellectual arms, above all aimed at capturing feeling and imagination. The pharisaical egoism of England's ruling classes, the subject of Galsworthy's debut, remained his program for the future, only specialized in his particular works. He never tired of fighting against all that seemed narrow and harsh in the national character, and the persistence of his attacks on social evil indicates his strong impressions and deeply wounded feeling of justice.

With the Forsyte type he now aimed at the upper middle class, the rich businessmen, a group not yet having reached real gentility, but striving with its sympathies and instincts toward the well-known ideal of the gentleman of rigid, imperturbable, and imposing correctness. These people are particularly on their guard against dangerous feelings, a fact which, however, does not exclude accidental lapses, when passion intrudes upon their life, and liberty claims its rights in a world of property instincts. Beauty, here represented by Irene, does not like to live with *The Man of Property*; in his bitter indignation at this, Soames Forsyte becomes almost a tragic figure. It seems uncertain if in the beginning Galsworthy thought of a sequel to that first Forsyte novel, which is a masterpiece of an energetic, firm, and independent account of human nature. At any rate it was not until fifteen years later that he again took up his

Forsytes, and at this time the effects of the World War had radically changed the perspective. But now this work expanded; *In Chancery* (1920) and *To Let* (1921) and two short story interludes were added, and thus *The Forsyte Saga* proper was completed. Not finished with the younger members of the family, Galsworthy wrote *A Modern Comedy*, a new trilogy whose structure is exactly like that of its predecessor and consists of the three novels, *The White Monkey* (1924), *The Silver Spoon* (1926), and *Swan Song* (1928), united by two short story interludes. These two trilogies together form an unusual literary accomplishment. The novelist has carried the history of his time through three generations, and his success in mastering so excellently his enormously difficult material, both in its scope and in its depth, remains an extremely memorable feat in English literature – doubly remarkable, if we consider that it was performed in a field in which the European continent had already produced some of its best works.

In the foreground of this chronicle is everyday reality, as experienced by the Forsytes, all personal fortunes, conflicts, and tragicomedies. But in the background is visible the dark fabric of historical events. Every reader is sure to remember the chapter describing how Soames with his second wife witnesses the funeral of Queen Victoria in grey weather at the Hyde Park fence, and the rapid survey of the age from her accession to the throne: «Morals had changed, manners had changed, men had become monkeys twice removed, God had become Mammon – Mammon so respectable as to deceive himself.» In the Forsyte novels we observe the transformation and the dissolution of the Victorian age up to our days. In the first trilogy comes to life the period that in England effected the fusion of nobility and plutocracy with the accompanying change of the notion of a «gentleman», a kind of Indian summer of wealth before the days of the storm. The second trilogy, no longer called «saga» but «comedy», describes the profound crisis of the new England whose task is to change the ruins of the past and the improvised barracks of wartime into its future home. The gallery of types is admirably complete. Robust businessmen, spoiled society ladies, aunts touching in an old-fashioned way, rebellious young girls, gentlemen of the clubs, politicians, artists, children, and even dogs – these last-mentioned especially favoured by Galsworthy – emerge in the London panorama in a concrete form, alive before our eyes and ears.

The situations recur as a curious documentation of the oscillation and the undulation in a family of given hereditary dispositions. The individual portraits are distinguished, and the law of social life is at work.

It is also instructive, however, to observe in these novels how Galsworthy's view gradually changes. The radical critic of culture rises by degrees to a greater objectivity in his appreciation and to a more liberal view of the purely human. An often cited example of this is his treatment of Soames, this standard national type, at first satirized, but then described with a respect that, reluctantly growing, finally changes into a genuine sympathy. Galsworthy has seized upon this sympathy; his characterization of Soames's personality thoroughly worked out becomes the most memorable feature of the Forsyte saga and the comedy of the descendants. One easily

remembers one of those masterly final episodes of *Swan Song*, in which Old Soames, having driven to his ancestors' village on the west coast, finds with the help of an old census map the place where the Forsytes' farm had been situated, where only a single stone marks the site. Something like the ghost of a path leads him down into a valley of grass and furze. He breathes in the fresh, rough sea air which goes a little to his head; he puts on his overcoat and sits musing, his back against the stone. Had his ancestors built the house themselves at this lonely place, had they been the first to settle down here? he wonders. Their England rises before him, an England «of pack horses and very little smoke, of peat and wood fires, and wives who never left you, because they couldn't probably». He sits there a long time, absorbed in his feeling for the birthplace.

«And something moved in him, as if the salty independence of that lonely spot were still in his bones. Old Jolyon and his own father and the rest of his uncles – no wonder they'd been independent, with this air and loneliness in their blood; and crabbed with the pickling of it – unable to give up, to let go, to die. For a moment he seemed to understand even himself.»

To Galsworthy Soames thus becomes one of the last representatives of static old England. There was no humbug in him, we are told; he had his trying ways, but he was genuine. The sober prosaic respectability is in this manner duly honoured in Galsworthy's realism, and this has been pointed out as the essential factor in his judgment of human nature. As time passed, and the weary, cynical laxity grew more and more visibly modern, the chronicler found that several traits which under other circumstances had been little appreciated, perhaps really constituted the secret of the British power of resistance. On the whole, Galsworthy's later novels are permeated with a patriotic feeling of self-defence that appears also in his descriptions of the home and studies of nature. Even these last-mentioned are rendered with a more tender and more anxious poetry, with the feeling of protecting something precious yet already shadowed by certain loss. It may be old chambers where people have established themselves as if to remain there forever. Or it may be an English garden park, where the September sun is shining beautifully on bronze-coloured beech leaves and centenary hedges of yew.

Time does not permit me to dwell in the same detail upon other of Galsworthy's works, often quite comparable in quality to the Forsyte series, which surpasses them by virtue of its epic dimensions. It is above all in *The Country House* (1907), in *Fraternity* (1901), and in *The Dark Flower* (1913) that his mature essential character is to be sought. In the novel of the manor he created perhaps his most exquisite female portrait, Mrs. Pendyce, the type of the perfect, unaffected lady with all the modest tragedy which surrounds a truly noble nature, condemned to be restrained if not destroyed by the fetters of tradition. In *Fraternity* he represented, with a discreet mixture of pity and irony, the unfulfilled martyr of social conscience, the aesthete who is tortured by the shadows of the proletarian masses in London, but is not able to take the decisive step and carry out his altruistic impulse of action. There we also meet the old original Mr. Stone, the utopian dreamer with his eternal

monologues beneath the night sky, indeed one of Galsworthy's most memorable types. Nor do we forget *The Dark Flower*, which may be called a psychological sonata, played with a masterly hand and based on the variations of passion and resignation in the ages of man. Even in the form of the short story Galsworthy has often been able to evoke an emotional response through contrasts of shadow and light which work rather graphically. He can do this in only a few pages which become animated by his personal style, for example, when he tells about such a simple case as that of the German shoemaker in «Quality», the story of the hopeless struggle of good craftsmanship against low-price industry.

By appealing to education and the sense of justice, his narrative art has always gently influenced contemporary notions of life and habits of thought. The same is true of his dramatic works, which were often direct contributions to social discussion and led to definite reforms at least in one area, the administration of public prisons in England. His dramas show an unusual richness of ideas combined with great ingenuity and technical skill in the working out of scenic effect. When certain inclinations are found, they are always just and humane. In *The Forest* (1924), for example, he brands the inconsiderate spirit of greed that, for crass purposes, exploits the heroism of the British world-conquering mind. *The Show* (1925) represents the defencelessness of the individual against the press in a family tragedy where brutal newspaper curiosity functions like a deaf and unchecked machine, removing the possibility of any one being held responsible for the resultant evil.

Loyalties depicts a matter of honour in which loyalty is tested and impartially examined in the different circles where it is at work, that is, the family, the corporation, the profession, and the nation. The force of these and other plays is in their logical structure and their concentrated action; sometimes they also possess an atmosphere of poetic feeling that is far from trivial. I am thinking especially of *A Pigeon* (1912) and *A Bit o' Love* (1915) which, however, did not meet with such brilliant success on the stage. Although on the whole Galsworthy's plays cannot be rated artistically with his novels, they confirm quite as plainly how strongly he sticks to his early ideal of liberty, that which in Shelley put on the wings and flames of dawn. Even in his rather cool dramatic works we meet a steady enemy of all oppression, spiritual as well as material, a sensitive man who with all his heart reacts against lack of consideration and never gives way in his demand for fair play.

In technique Turgenev is one of his first teachers. As in the charming Russian narrator, we find in Galsworthy a definite musical charm catching and keeping the hidden feelings. His intuition is so infallible that he can content himself with a slight allusion and a broken hint. But then there is Galsworthy's irony, such a singular instrument that even the tone separates him from any other writer. There are many different kinds of irony. One principal kind is negative and can be compared to the hoar-frost of the windows in a house where there is no fire, where the hearth has grown cold long ago. But there is also an irony friendly to life, springing from warmth, interest, and humanity; such is Galsworthy's. His is an irony that, in the presence of tragicomic evil, seems to question why it must be so, why it is necessary, and whether there is nothing to remedy it. Sometimes Galsworthy makes nature herself take part in that ironic play about human beings, to underline the bitterness or sweetness of the

incidents with the help of winds, clouds, fragrances, and bird cries. Assisted by this irony he successfully appeals to the psychological imagination, always the best ally of understanding and sympathy.

Galsworthy once formulated his artistic motto in words such as harmony, proportion, balance. They mark his natural turn of mind, a spiritual ideal, now often suspect, perhaps because it is so difficult to reach. We soon discover that this poet who so severely and persistently attacked the typical gentleman of self-sufficiency, himself indisputably succeeded in filling the old notion with new life, so that it preserved its contact with both the immediately human and the unrestricted aesthetic instinct. In the artist Galsworthy flourish exactly those qualities of temper that in English are comprehended in this word: *gentleness*. These qualities are expressed in his works, and in this way they have become a cultural contribution to our own times.
As Mr. Galsworthy has unfortunately been prevented by illness from being here today, as he had wished, to receive personally the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1932, it will now be delivered to the representative of Great Britain here present, Minister Clark Kerr.

Your Excellency – May I ask you to receive from His Majesty's hands the Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded to your famous countryman.

At the banquet, Gunnar Holmgren, Rector of the Caroline Institute, made these remarks:

«Finally, we are today paying homage to John Galsworthy. If this our homage is marked by a feeling of very special warmth, it is largely because his noble personality and his exquisite artistic gifts, as displayed in his numerous literary works, have long been famous and highly appreciated all over the world. But the reason is no less to be found in that spirit of idealism, that warm sympathy and true humanity that radiate from all his writings and render him especially worthy to receive a gift from Alfred Nobel's Foundation. We regret very deeply that unfortunate circumstances have prevented John Galsworthy from being present here today. We should have been happy indeed to have had the privilege at the same time of honouring in his person the incarnation of that high-minded and idealistic England which we all love and admire. I beg to request His Excellency the British Minister kindly to convey to him our sincere greetings and heartiest congratulations.»

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Notable Adaptations

The Forsyte Saga has been filmed several times:

- *That Forsyte Woman* (1949), dir. by Compton Bennett, an MGM adaptation in which Errol Flynn played a rare villainous role as Soames.
- *The Forsyte Saga* (1967 TV series), directed by James Cellan Jones, David Giles, starring Eric Porter, Nyree Dawn Porter, Kenneth More, and Susan Hampshire, 26 parts.
- *The Forsyte Saga* (2002 TV series), dir. by Christopher Menaul, starring Gina McKee, Damian Lewis, Rupert Graves, and Corin Redgrave, 13 parts.

The White Monkey was made into a silent film of the same name in 1925, directed by Phil Rosen, and starring Barbara La Marr, Thomas Holding, and Henry Victor.

The Skin Game was adapted and directed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1931. It starred C.V. France, Helen Haye, Jill Esmond, Edmund Gwenn, John Longden and Phyllis Konstam.

Escape was filmed in 1930 and 1948. The latter was directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, starring Rex Harrison, Peggy Cummins, and William Hartnell. The screenplay was by Philip Dunne.

One More River (a film version of Galsworthy's *Over the River*) was filmed by James Whale in 1934. The film starred Frank Lawton, Colin Clive (one of Whale's most frequently used actors) and Diana Wynyard, and featured Mrs. Patrick Campbell in a rare sound film appearance.

The First and the Last, a short play, was adapted as *21 Days*, starring Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier.

Galsworthy's short story *The Apple Tree* was adapted into a radio play for Orson Welles's *Lady Esther Almanac* radio series on CBS, first broadcast on 12 January 1942; the play was again produced by Welles for CBS on *The Mercury Summer Theatre* of 6 September 1946. The 1988 film *A Summer Story* was also based on *The Apple Tree*.

The *NBC University Theater* aired radio adaptations of his plays *Justice* on 31 October 1948 and *The Patrician* on 26 February 1950.

The Mob, adapted by John Foley in 2004 for the BBC Radio World Service.

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Research begins here
New World Encyclopedia™

{https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_Galsworthy}

John Galsworthy (August 14, 1867 – January 31, 1933) was an English novelist and playwright. Notable works include *The Forsyte Saga* (1906–1921) and its sequels, *A Modern Comedy* and *End of the Chapter*. Galsworthy's novels addressed the class system in England, especially the rise of the merchant class, or "new money," and its relations to the aristocracy, or "old money." In the wake

of the Industrial Revolution and urbanization, Galsworthy's works reflected the inevitable conflicts that arose during the transition from a more pastoral society to a modern one. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1932.

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American Literature

{https://americanliterature.com/author/john-galsworthy}

John Galsworthy (1865 - 1933) was an English novelist and playwright who earned the 1932 Nobel Prize in Literature. His most recognized works include, The Forsyte Saga (1922) and its sequels, ***A Modern Comedy*** and ***End of the Chapter***.

Galsworthy came from a prominent and wealthy family, raised on a large property in Kingston on the Thames, that now hosts three schools. His first published work was in 1897, a collection of short stories titled ***From the Four Winds***. We feature some of Galsworthy's short stories that were popularized in anthologies from the early 20th century, as well as his first series play, The Silver Box: A Comedy in Three Acts.

The Foresyte Saga

by *John Galsworthy*

The Foresyte Saga (1922) is John Galsworthy's most recognized work, published as three volumes:
Volume 1: The Man of Property
Volume 2: Indian Summer of a Foresyte, and In Chancery
Volume 3: Awakening, and To Let

TO MY WIFE:

I DEDICATE THE FORSYTE SAGA IN ITS ENTIRETY,
BELIEVING IT TO BE OF ALL MY WORKS THE LEAST
UNWORTHY OF ONE WITHOUT WHOSE ENCOURAGEMENT,
SYMPATHY AND CRITICISM I COULD NEVER HAVE
BECOME EVEN SUCH A WRITER AS I AM.

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Volume II - The Indian Summer of a Foresyte and In Chancery

Volume III - Awakening and To Let

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Videos

[01] John Galsworthy Plays Theme | Most Important Must watch

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQVF3A0LIxE [41:04]

In this video, we delve deep into the legacy of John Galsworthy, a literary giant of the 20th century. From his early life and education to his remarkable contributions to literature, we'll uncover the fascinating story behind this iconic writer. Discover how Galsworthy's social conscience and keen observations of society shaped his

masterpieces, including "The Forsyte Saga" and the powerful play "Justice." We'll explore the themes, characters, and influences that made his works enduring classics.

[02] STRIFE BY JOHN GALSWORTHY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoBQVvNvfzw [45:39]

[03] The Pigeon - Great Plays - John Galsworthy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTO_UiFJo34 [56:57]

"The Pigeon" by John Galsworthy is a one-act play that explores themes of love, jealousy, and human nature. The plot revolves around a married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Meadows, whose seemingly tranquil domestic life is disrupted by the arrival of a pigeon. The pigeon serves as a symbol of conflict, triggering tensions between the couple. Mr. Meadows is an older, more composed man, while his wife, Mrs. Meadows, is younger and more emotional. As the play unfolds, it becomes clear that the couple's marriage is not as harmonious as it appears. The pigeon, which was intended as a simple gift, becomes a catalyst for an argument, revealing deeper issues of trust and resentment between the couple. In Galsworthy's characteristic style, "The Pigeon" critiques societal expectations and the role of individuals within relationships, using the seemingly trivial incident of a pigeon to explore deeper emotional truths.

[04] John Galsworthy complete Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjW3ksqDkQQ [3:25:36]

[05] Biography of John Galsworthy, Life and Works

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__2KRJosjtg [43:21]

[06] CRITICAL COMMENTS ON JOHN GALSWORTHY & THE SILVER BOX STORY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=by9lX-KkxKU [48:45]

[07] John Galsworthy, biography, works, important points, new facts

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQPWmCTZoEg [51:50]

[08] John Galsworthy :: Complete Author in a Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jQ3r13VyVM [4:05:11]

[09] John Galsworthy's Biography : Important Works & His Awards

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5VUUcGwo08 [22:36]

[10] Loyalties by John Galsworthy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=os5-gdD3gu4 [48:34]

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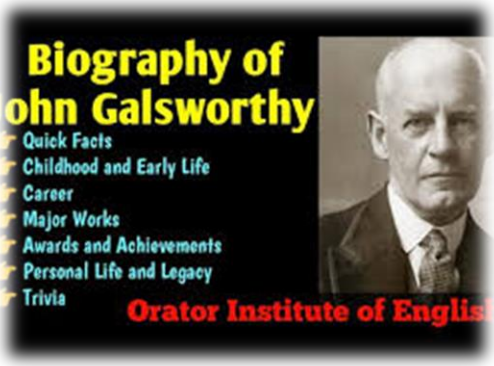

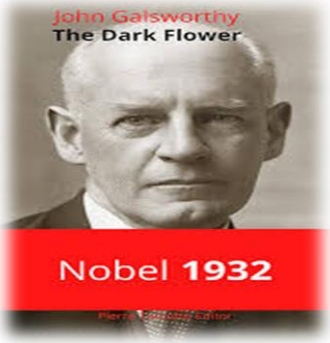

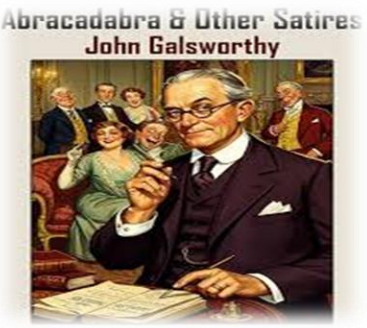

16 Oct 1888

27 Nov 1951

Eugene O'Neill

Nobel Prize in Literature 1936

Born: 16 October 1888, New York, NY, USA
Died: 27 November 1953, Boston, MA, USA
Residence at the time of the award: USA
Prize motivation:

"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1936/oneill/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1934, by Martin Lamm
- Literature 1935, by Martin Lamm
- Literature 1936, by Henrik Schück

Links to other sites

[01] On Eugene O'Neill from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site
[03] eOneill.com – An electronic Eugene O'Neill Archive
[04] Selected Poetry of Eugene O'Neill from Representative Poetry Online, University of Toronto Libraries
[05] 'American Masters: Eugene O'Neill' from PBS

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Per Hallström, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, on December 10, 1936

Eugene O'Neill's dramatic production has been of a sombre character from the very first, and for him life as a whole quite early came to signify tragedy.

This has been attributed to the bitter experiences of his youth, more especially to what he underwent as a sailor. The legendary nimbus that gathers around celebrities in his case took the form of heroic events created out of his background. With his contempt for publicity, O'Neill straightway put a stop to all such attempts; there was no glamour to be derived from his drab hardships and toils. We may indeed conclude that the stern experiences were not uncongenial to his spirit, tending as they did to afford release of certain chaotic forces within him.

His pessimism was presumably on the one hand an innate trait of his being, on the other an offshoot of the literary current of the age, though possibly it is rather to be interpreted as the reaction of a profound personality to the American optimism of old tradition. Whatever the source of his pessimism may have been, however, the line of his development was marked out, and O'Neill became by degrees the uniquely and fiercely tragic dramatist that the world has come to know. The conception of life that he presents is not a product of elaborate thinking, but it has the genuine stamp of something lived through. It is based upon an exceedingly intense, one might say, heart-rent, realization of the austerity of life, side by side with a kind of rapture at the beauty of human destinies shaped in the struggle against odds.

A primitive sense of tragedy, as we see, lacking moral backing and achieving no inner victory – merely the bricks and mortar for the temple of tragedy in the grand and ancient style. By his very primitiveness, however, this modern tragedian has reached the well-

spring of this form of creative art, a naive and simple belief in fate. At certain stages it has contributed a stream of pulsating life-blood to his work.

That was, however, at a later period. In his earliest dramas O'Neill was a strict and somewhat arid realist; those works we may here pass by. Of more moment were a series of one-act plays, based upon material assembled during his years at sea. They brought to the theatre something novel, and hence he attracted attention.

Those plays were not, however, dramatically notable; properly speaking, merely short stories couched in dialogue-form; true works of art, however, of their type, and heart-stirring in their simple, rugged delineation. In one of them, *The Moon of the Caribbees* (1918), he attains poetic heights, partly by the tenderness in depicting the indigence of a sailor's life with its naive illusions of joy, and pertly by the artistic background of the play: dirge-like Negro songs coming from a white coral shore beneath metallically glittering palms and the great moon of the Caribbean Sea. Altogether it is a mystical weave of melancholy, primitive savagery, yearning, lunar effulgence, and oppressive desolateness.

The drama *Anna Christie* (1921) achieves its most striking effect through the description of sailors' life ashore in and about waterfront saloons. The first act is O'Neill's masterpiece in the domain of strict realism, each character being depicted with supreme sureness and mastery. The content is the raising of a fallen Swedish girl to respectable human status by the strong and wholesome influences of the sea; for once pessimism is left out of the picture, the play having what is termed a happy ending.

With his drama *The Hairy Ape* (1922), also concerned with sailors' lives, O'Neill launches into that expressionism which sets its stamp upon his «ideadramas». The aim of expressionism in literature and the plastic arts is difficult to determine; nor need we discuss it, since for practical purposes a brief description suffices. It endeavours to produce its effects by a sort of mathematical method; it may be said to extract the square root of the complex phenomena of reality, and build with those abstractions a new world on an enormously magnified scale. The procedure is an irksome one and can hardly be said to achieve mathematical exactitude; for a long time, however, it met with great success throughout the world.

The Hairy Ape seeks to present on a monumental scale the rebellious slave of steam power, intoxicated with his force and with superman ideas. Outwardly he is a relapse to primitive man, and he presents himself as a kind of beast, suffering from yearning for genius. The play depicts his tragical discomfiture and ruin on being brought up against cruel society.

Subsequently O'Neill devoted himself for a number of years to a boldly expressionistic treatment of ideas and social questions. The resulting plays have little connection with real life; the poet and dreamer isolates himself, becoming absorbed in feverishly pursued speculation and phantasy.

The Emperor Jones (1920), as an artistic creation, stands rather by itself; through it the playwright first secured any considerable celebrity. The theme embraces the mental breakdown of a Negro despot who rules over a Negro-populated island in the West Indies. The despot perishes on the flight from his glory, hunted in the dead of night by the troll-drums of his pursuers and by recollections of the past shaping themselves as paralyzing

visions. These memories stretch back beyond his own life to the dark continent of Africa. Here lies concealed the theory of the individual's unconscious inner life being the carrier of the successive stages in the evolution of the race. As to the rightness of the theory we need form no opinion; the play takes so strong a hold upon our nerves and senses that our attention is entirely absorbed.

The «dramas of ideas» proper are too numerous and too diversified to be included in a brief survey. Their themes derive from contemporary life or from sagas and legends; all are metamorphosed by the author's fancy. They play on emotional chords all tightly strung, give amazing decorative effects, and manifest a never-failing dramatic energy. Practically speaking, everything in human life in the nature of struggle or combat has here been used as a subject for creative treatment, solutions being sought for and tried out of the spiritual or mental riddles presented. One favourite theme is the cleavage of personality that arises when an individual's true character is driven in upon itself by pressure from the world without, having to yield place to a make-believe character, its own live traits being hidden behind a mask. The dramatist's musings are apt to delve so deep that what he evolves has an urge, like deep-sea fauna, to burst asunder on being brought into the light of day. The results he achieves, however, are never without poetry; there is an abundant flow of passionate, pregnant words. The action, too, yields evidence in every case of the never-slumbering energy that is one of O'Neill's greatest gifts.

Underneath O'Neill's fantastic love of experimenting, however, is a hint of a yearning to attain the monumental simplicity characteristic of ancient drama. In his *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) he made an attempt in that irection, drawing his motif from the New England farming community, hardened in te progress of generations into a type of Puritanism that had gradually come to forfeit its idealistic inspiration. The course embarked upon was to be followed with more success in the «Electra» trilogy.

In between appeared *A Play; Strange Interlude* (1928), which won high praise and became renowned. It is rightly termed «A Play», for with its broad and loose-knit method of presentation it cannot be regarded as a tragedy; it would rather seem most aptly defined as a psychological novel in scenes. To its subtitle, «Strange Interlude», a direct clue is given in the course of the play: «Life, the present, is the strange interlude between the past and what is to come.» The author tries to make his idea clear, as far as possible, by resorting to a peculiar device: on the one hand, the characters speak and reply as the action of the play demands; on the other, they reveal their real natures and their recollections in the form of monologues, inaudible to the other characters upon the stage. Once again, the element of masking!

Regarded as a psychological novel, up to the point at which it becomes too improbable for any psychology, the work is very notable for its wealth of analytical and above all intuitive acumen, and for the profound insight it displays into the inner workings of the human spirit. The training bore fruit in the real tragedy that followed, the author's grandest work: *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931). Both in the story it unfolds and in the destiny-charged atmosphere enshrouding it, this play keeps close to the tradition of the ancient drama, though in both respects it is adjusted to modern life and to modern lines of thought. The scene of this tragedy of the modern-time house of Atreus is laid in the period of the great Civil War, America's *Iliad*. That choice lends the drama the clear perspective of the past and yet provides it with a background of intellectual life and thought sufficiently close to the present day. The most remarkable feature in the drama is the way in which the element of fate has been further developed. It is based upon up-to-date hypotheses, primarily upon the natural-scientific determinism of the doctrine of

heredity, and also upon the Freudian omniscience concerning the unconscious, the nightmare dream of perverse family emotions.

These hypotheses are not, as we know, established beyond dispute, but the all-important point regarding this drama is that its author has embraced and applied them with unflinching consistency, constructing upon their foundation a chain of events as inescapable as if they had been proclaimed by the Sphinx of Thebes herself; Thereby he has achieved a masterly example of constructive ability and elaborate motivation of plot, and one that is surely without a counterpart in the whole range of latter-day drama. This applies especially to the first two parts of the trilogy.

Two dramas, wholly different and of a new type for O'Neill, followed. They constitute a characteristic illustration of the way he has of never resting content with a result achieved, no matter what success it may have met with. They also gave evidence of his courage, for in them he launched a challenge to a considerable section of those whose favourable opinions he had won, and even to the dictators of those opinions. Though it may not at the present time be dangerous to defy natural human feelings and conceptions, it is not by any means free from risk to prick the sensitive conscience of critics. In *Ah, Wilderness* (1933) the esteemed writer of tragedies astonished his admirers by presenting them with an idyllic middle-class comedy and carried his audiences with him. In its depiction of the spiritual life of young people the play contains a good deal of poetry, while its gayer scenes display unaffected humour and comedy; it is, moreover, throughout simple and human in its appeal.

In *Days Without End* (1934) the dramatist tackled the problem of religion, one that he had until then touched upon only superficially, without identifying himself with it, and merely from the natural scientist's combative standpoint. In this play he showed that he had an eye for the irrational, felt the need of absolute values, and was alive to the danger of spiritual impoverishment in the empty space that will be all that is left over the hard and solid world of rationalism. The form the work took was that of a modern miracle play, and perhaps, as with his tragedies of fate, the temptation to experiment was of great importance in its origination. Strictly observing the conventions of the drama form chosen, he adopted medieval naiveté in his presentation of the struggle of good against evil, introducing, however, novel and bold features of stage technique. The principal character he cleaves into two parts, white and black, not only inwardly but also corporeally, each half leading its own independent bodily life – a species of Siamese twins contradicting each other. The result is a variation upon earlier experiments. Notwithstanding the risk attendant upon that venture, the drama is sustained by the author's rare mastery of scenic treatment, while in the spokesman of religion, a Catholic priest, O'Neill has created one of his most lifelike characters. Whether that circumstance may be interpreted as indicating a decisive change in his outlook upon life remains to be seen in the future.

O'Neill's dramatic production has been extraordinarily comprehensive in scope, versatile in character, and abundantly fruitful in new departures; and still its originator is at a stage of vigorous development. Yet in essential matters, he himself has always been the same in the exuberant end unrestrainably lively play of his imagination, in his never-wearying delight in giving shape to the ideas, whether emanating from within or without, that have jostled one another in the depths of his contemplative nature, and, perhaps first and foremost, in his possession of a proudly and ruggedly independent character.

In choosing Eugene O'Neill as the recipient of the 1936 Nobel Prize in Literature, the Swedish Academy can express its appreciation of his peculiar and rare literary gifts and also express their homage to his personality in these words: the Prize has been awarded to him for dramatic works of vital energy, sincerity, and intensity of feeling, stamped with an original conception of tragedy.

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Banquet Speech

As the Laureate was unable to be present at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1936, the speech was read by James E. Brown, Jr., American Chargé d'Affaires

It is an extraordinary privilege that has come to me to take before this gathering of eminent persons the place of my fellow-countryman, Mr. Eugene O'Neill, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, who unfortunately is unable to be present here today.

It is an extraordinary privilege because the significance and true worth of the Nobel Prizes are fully recognized in all advanced parts of the world. The Prizes are justly held in honor and esteem, for it is well known that they are awarded without prejudice of any kind by the several committees whose members generously devote much time and thought to the task in their charge.

In addition to being a stimulus to endeavour and a high recognition of achievement, the Prizes are valuable in another respect. Owing to the complete absence of partiality in the awarding of them, they induce people of all countries to think in terms of the world and mankind, heedless of classifications or boundaries of any character. The good influence of such conspicuous recognition of a particular achievement thus spreads far beyond its special purpose.

Mr. O'Neill has been prevented from being here today principally because the state of his health, damaged by overwork, has forced him to follow his doctor's orders to live absolutely quietly for several months. It is his hope, and I follow his own words in a letter to me, that all those connected with the festival will accept in good faith his statement of the impossibility of his attending, and not put it down to arbitrary temperament, or anything of the sort.

In view of his inability to attend, he promptly sent a speech to be read on his behalf on this occasion. Mr. O'Neill in a letter to me said regarding his speech, «It is no mere artful gesture to please a Swedish audience. It is a plain statement of fact and my exact feeling, and I am glad of this opportunity to get it said and on record.» It affords me great pleasure to read now the speech addressed to this gathering by Mr. Eugene O'Neill.

«First, I wish to express again to you my deep regret that circumstances have made it impossible for me to visit Sweden in time for the festival, and to be present at this banquet to tell you in person of my grateful appreciation.

It is difficult to put into anything like adequate words the profound gratitude I feel for the greatest honor that my work could ever hope to attain, the award of the Nobel Prize. This highest of distinctions is all the more grateful to me because I feel so deeply that it is not only my work which is being honored, but the work of all my colleagues in America – that this Nobel Prize is a symbol of the recognition by Europe of the coming-of-age of the American theatre. For my plays are merely, through luck of time and circumstance, the most widely-known examples of the work done by American playwrights in the years since the World War – work that has finally made modern American drama in its finest aspects an achievement of which Americans can be justly proud, worthy at last to claim kinship with the modern drama of Europe, from which our original inspiration so surely derives.

This thought of original inspiration brings me to what is, for me, the greatest happiness this occasion affords, and that is the opportunity it gives me to acknowledge, with gratitude and pride, to you and to the people of Sweden, the debt my work owes to that greatest genius of all modern dramatists, your August Strindberg.

It was reading his plays when I first started to write back in the winter of 1913-14 that, above all else, first gave me the vision of what modern drama could be, and first inspired me with the urge to write for the theatre myself. If there is anything of lasting worth in my work, it is due to that original impulse from him, which has continued as my inspiration down all the years since then – to the ambition I received then to follow in the footsteps of his genius as worthily as my talent might permit, and with the same integrity of purpose.

Of course, it will be no news to you in Sweden that my work owes much to the influence of Strindberg. That influence runs clearly through more than a few of my plays and is plain for everyone to see. Neither will it be news for anyone who has ever known me, for I have always stressed it myself. I have never been one of those who are so timidly uncertain of their own contribution that they feel they cannot afford to admit ever having been influenced, lest they be discovered as lacking all originality.

No, I am only too proud of my debt to Strindberg, only too happy to have this opportunity of proclaiming it to his people. For me, he remains, as Nietzsche remains in his sphere, the Master, still to this day more modern than any of us, still our leader. And it is my pride to imagine that perhaps his spirit, musing over this year's Nobel award for literature, may smile with a little satisfaction, and find the follower not too unworthy of his Master.»

Prior to the speech, Robert Fries, Director of the Bergius Foundation, remarked:

«It is difficult to explain the vital processes in the living organism; it is difficult to interpret the inmost essence of matter, but it is perhaps most difficult to sound

the human mind and to understand the soul in its shifting phases. With passionate intensity and impulsive genius Eugene O'Neill has done this in his dramas, and one cannot but be captivated by the masterly way in which he deals with the great problems of life.»

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Nobel Diploma

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN
HAR VID SAMMANTRÄDE DEN 12 NOVEMBER 1936
I ENLIGHET MED FÖRESKRIFTEN I
ALFRED NOBELS
TESTAMENTE AV DEN 27 NOVEMBER 1895
BESLUTAT ÖVERLÄMNA
1936 ÅRS NOBELPRIS I LITTERATUR TILL
EUGENE O' NEILL
FÖR HANS AVKRAFT, ÄRLIGHET OCH STARK
KÄNSLA SAMT SJÄLVSTÄNDIG TRAGISK
UPPFATTNING PRÄGLADE DRAMATIK.
STOCKHOLM DEN 10 DECEMBER 1936.

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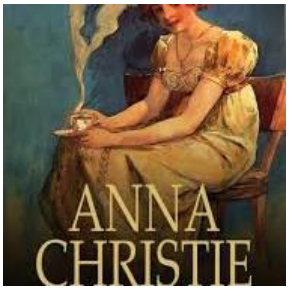
Pulitzer Prize

Eugene O'Neill won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama four times: for **Beyond the Horizon** (1920), **Anna Christie** (1922), **Strange Interlude** (1928), and, posthumously, for **Long Day's Journey into Night** (1957). He is the only playwright to have won the award four times, a distinction that established him as the foremost American dramatist of the 20th century.

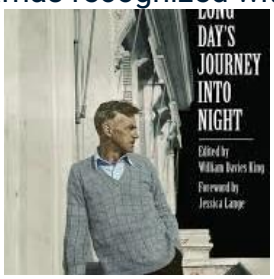
His Pulitzer Prize-winning Plays

Beyond the Horizon (1920):
O'Neill's debut play that brought him to national attention and his first Pulitzer Prize.



Anna Christie (1922):
The second play for which he received the prestigious award.

Strange Interlude (1928):
Another of his dramas recognized with a Pulitzer Prize.



Long Day's Journey into Night (1957):
This autobiographical masterpiece was published and awarded the Pulitzer Prize five years after O'Neill's death.

- O'Neill's four Pulitzer Prizes are more than any other playwright in history.
- His work, which often deals with themes of human tragedy, disillusionment, and the human condition, was instrumental in the development of modern American drama.
- After winning these awards, O'Neill became the first American to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936, further cementing his legacy.

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Eugene O'Neill Award

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_O%27Neill_Award

The **Eugene O'Neill Award** (Swedish: *O'Neill-stipendiet*) is one of Sweden's finest awards for stage actors. It is a scholarship for actors at the Swedish theater. It has been awarded annually by the Royal Dramatic Theatre since 1956.

History

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill (1888–1953) was a noted American playwright. He was a four winner of the Pulitzer Prize for drama and was the Nobel laureate for literature in 1936.

Just before Eugene O'Neill died in 1953, he drew up a will in which he gave the then not yet staged play *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (written in 1941) to Sweden's Royal Dramatic Theatre, along with exclusive first performance rights. The play had its world premiere in Stockholm on February 2, 1956. The gesture was as thanks for the Royal Dramatic Theatre's continued interest in staging his plays (more so than any other theatre in the world), and for Swedish appreciation of his work long before he became recognized internationally, or in his home country.

Later his widow American stage and film actress Carlotta Monterey (1888– 1970), also gave the Royal Dramatic Theatre the performing rights to *A Touch of the Poet* (1942), *Hughie* (1942) and *More Stately Mansions* (posthumous). She refused staging fees for his plays in Sweden, provided that 8% of the royalties from the revenues of each performance were given to the Eugene O'Neill Memory Fund, which manages the money for the Eugene O'Neill Award.

The scholarship is bestowed annually on the 16th of October, the anniversary of O'Neill's birthday. In accordance with O'Neill's own wishes, it is given to "highly deserving actors of the Royal Dramatic Theatre". Recipients of the award are decided by Dramaten's board of directors. As an extra honour to Eugene O'Neill, the first award was granted to the two actors who played the leading parts of James and Mary Tyrone in the original staging of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in February 1956; Lars Hanson (1886–1965) and Inga Tidblad (1901–1975).

Recipients

- 1956 – Lars Hanson and Inga Tidblad
- 1957 – Tora Teje
- 1958 – Anders Henrikson
- 1959 – Gunn Wållgren
- 1960 – Ulf Palme
- 1961 – Eva Dahlbeck
- 1962 – Olof Sandborg
- 1963 – Georg Rydeberg
- 1964 – Sif Ruud
- 1965 – Holger Löwenadler
- 1966 – Gertrud Fridh
- 1967 – Olof Widgren
- 1968 – Irma Christenson
- 1969 – Jan-Olof Strandberg
- 1970 – Birgitta Valberg
- 1971 – Anders Ek
- 1972 – Anita Björk
- 1973 – Olle Hilding
- 1974 – Margaretha Krook
- 1975 – Ernst-Hugo Järegård
- 1976 – Toivo Pawlo
- 1989 – Gunnel Lindblom
- 1990 – Thommy Berggren
- 1991 – Börje Ahlstedt
- 1992 – Erland Josephson
- 1993 – Lena Endre
- 1994 – Lennart Hjulström
- 1995 – Stina Ekblad
- 1996 – Per Myrberg
- 1997 – Krister Henriksson
- 1998 – Marie Göranzon
- 1999 – Keve Hjelm
- 2000 – Lil Terselius
- 2001 – Örjan Ramberg
- 2002 – Pernilla August
- 2003 – Björn Granath
- 2004 – Irene Lindh
- 2005 – Reine Brynolfsson
- 2006 – Lena Nyman
- 2007 – Rolf Skoglund
- 2008 – Anita Wall
- 2009 – Hans Klinga

• 1977 – Ulla Sjöblom • 1978 – Ingvar Kjellson • 1980 – Allan Edwall • 1981 – Aino Taube • 1982 – Jarl Kulle • 1983 – Ulf Johanson • 1984 – Margaretha Byström • 1985 – Sven Lindberg • 1986 – Mona Malm • 1987 – Hans Stråat • 1988 – Bibi Andersson and Jan Malmsjö	• 2010 – Malin Ek[13] • 2011 – Johan Rabaeus • 2012 – Kristina Törnqvist • 2013 – Pontus Gustafsson • 2014 – Thérèse Brunnander • 2015 – Per Mattsson • 2016 – Melinda Kinnaman • 2017 – Jonas Karlsson • 2018 – Ingela Olsson • 2019 – Erik Ehn • 2020 – Marie Richardson

Eugene O'Neill Foundation

{https://eugeneoneill.org/about-us/join-us/}

The Eugene O'Neill Foundation, Tao House works to celebrate and promote the vision and legacy of Eugene O'Neill, America's foremost playwright.

The Foundation provides artistic and educational programs as well as a unique collection of resources that focus on Eugene O'Neill's contribution to theatre in America and the world.

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National Park Service

{https://www.nps.gov/euon/index.htm}

The Beautiful Home and Engaging Story Of Eugene O'Neill

America's only Nobel Prize-winning playwright, Eugene O'Neill, chose Northern California as his sanctuary at the pinnacle of his writing career. Secluded from the outside world within the serene walls of his Tao House, O'Neill crafted his final and most memorable masterpieces: The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey Into Night, and A Moon for the Misbegotten.

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A Chronology

Eugene O'Neill's Life at a Glance

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill, born in 1888, stands as one of America's greatest playwrights, whose works revolutionized the American theater landscape.
His life was marked by personal struggles, profound insights, and groundbreaking achievements that earned him multiple Pulitzer Prizes and the Nobel Prize in Literature. This timeline chronicles the key events in O'Neill's life, from his early years and turbulent family dynamics to his prolific career and lasting legacy in dramatic literature. Through this journey, we glimpse the complexities of a man who transformed his personal experiences into powerful narratives that continue to resonate with audiences today.

1877 – A Marriage and Controversy

In June, James O'Neill, a successful and celebrated stage actor, marries Mary Ellen "Ella" Quinlan, beginning a relationship that will deeply impact the life of their future son, Eugene. However, their union is immediately marred by scandal when Nettie Walsh claims to have been married to James since 1871, even filing for divorce. This early controversy casts a shadow on what should have been a happy chapter in the O'Neill family story, laying the groundwork for the tumultuous family life Eugene would later write about.

1883 – The Birth of a Theatrical Legacy

On February 12, James O'Neill takes the stage as the lead in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a role that defines his career for the next three decades. Performing the character over 6,000 times, James sacrifices his ambition for artistic variety in favor of commercial success. The play becomes a fixture in his life, so much so that Eugene is born into the theater world, and James' career in *Monte Cristo* becomes a lasting symbol of both achievement and regret for the O'Neill family.

1885 – Tragedy Strikes the O'Neill Family

The O'Neill family faces a devastating blow on March 4 when Edmund O'Neill, James and Ella's second son, dies from measles at the age of 1-1/2. This loss is further compounded by Ella's belief that her eldest son, Jamie, intentionally exposed Edmund to the disease. The tragedy fractures the family, sowing deep emotional wounds and setting the stage for the guilt, loss, and grief that will echo through Eugene's later works.

1888 – Eugene O'Neill Enters the World

On October 16, Eugene Gladstone O'Neill is born in a hotel room on Broadway, a fitting entry for a future playwright who will revolutionize American theater. During the labor, Ella is given morphine for the pain, beginning a lifelong addiction. Just two days later, James returns to his tour of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, leaving the newborn Eugene to spend his earliest years traveling with his father on the road. These formative experiences of life in the theater, marked by absence and addiction, shape Eugene's view of family and the world.

1895 – Education and Rebellion

In September, seven-year-old Eugene enters St. Aloysius Academy for Boys, a strict Catholic boarding school that imposes harsh discipline. His experiences at the academy leave him deeply disillusioned with the Catholic faith, and as a teenager, he leaves the church, never to return. This early rejection of his religious upbringing marks the beginning of Eugene's search for meaning in life, a quest that will be reflected in the existential themes of his later plays.

1906 – The Princeton Experiment

Eugene O'Neill enrolls at Princeton University in September, embarking on what is to be a brief and tumultuous academic career. Princeton provides him with exposure to intellectual pursuits, but Eugene's reckless behavior, particularly his excessive drinking, soon leads to trouble. His time at the university is short-lived, as his lack of focus and indulgence in debauchery quickly lead to his expulsion.

1907 – Expulsion and Excess

In June, Eugene is expelled from Princeton for poor academic performance, signaling the end of his formal education. He returns to New York City, where he continues a life of heavy drinking and partying, often in the company of his older brother, Jamie. During this period, Eugene's reckless lifestyle spirals out of control, as he immerses himself in New York's seedier side—a world that will later serve as inspiration for many of his plays.

1909 – A Brief Marriage and Sea Voyages

On October 2, Eugene marries Kathleen Jenkins in secret, but their marriage is fraught with instability. Shortly after, Eugene sets sail on a voyage to Honduras, one of several long sea journeys he will take over the next few years. These experiences on the ocean inspire many of his early works, as he begins to develop his voice as a playwright. Kathleen gives birth to their son, Eugene O'Neill Jr., but the marriage dissolves in 1912. O'Neill's brief foray into domestic life leaves him disillusioned, driving him deeper into the bohemian world of artists and writers.

1912 – Darkness and a Turning Point

1912 marks one of the darkest periods in Eugene O'Neill's life. He is living in a New York boarding house, drinking heavily, and grappling with depression. After a failed suicide attempt, Eugene contracts tuberculosis, a disease that forces him to retreat and re-evaluate his life. During his recovery, he turns to reading and begins to nurture a desire to write plays. This marks a turning point in his life, as his time of illness and reflection gives rise to his determination to become a playwright.

1914 – Harvard and Early Playwriting

In the fall of 1914, O'Neill enrolls in George Pierce Baker's dramatic writing course at Harvard University, but leaves after one year. Though his time at Harvard is short, the exposure to the fundamentals of dramatic structure deepens his commitment to the craft. He soon begins writing one-act plays, drawing on his experiences at sea and in New York's underworld to shape his early works.

1916 – The Birth of a Playwright

Eugene O'Neill's career takes off when he joins the Provincetown Players, a group of avant-garde artists committed to experimental theater. In this nurturing environment, O'Neill's first one-act play, *Bound East for Cardiff*, is produced in Provincetown, Massachusetts. The play, a gritty depiction of life at sea, is well received and marks O'Neill's emergence as a promising new voice in American theater. His collaboration with the Provincetown Players paves the way for many of his future works.

1918 – A Second Marriage and Family Life

On April 12, Eugene marries writer Agnes Boulton, beginning a marriage that will produce two children: Shane and Oona. While O'Neill enjoys relative domestic stability for a time, his artistic and emotional restlessness soon disrupts the marriage. The strain of balancing family life with his growing career leads to a tumultuous relationship.

Ultimately, Eugene leaves Agnes for actress Carlotta Monterey, who becomes his third wife and lifelong companion.

1920 – First Broadway Success and Family Loss

In February, Eugene O'Neill's first full-length play, *Beyond the Horizon*, opens on Broadway. The play's success earns him his first Pulitzer Prize, solidifying his place in American theater. However, tragedy strikes when his father, James O'Neill, dies in August. James' passing leaves Eugene with conflicting emotions, as his father had confided to him that *The Count of Monte Cristo* had both made and cursed his career. These feelings of love, resentment, and loss towards his father would later emerge in O'Neill's greatest works.

1922 – The Loss of His Mother

In February, Ella O'Neill dies from a brain tumor in California, marking the end of Eugene's immediate family ties. With both his parents now gone, Eugene turns inward, writing plays that explore the complex and troubled relationships within his family. His grief over his mother's death influences many of the themes in his future work, particularly in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

1923 – Jamie O'Neill's Final Days

In November, Eugene's older brother Jamie, an alcoholic and broken man, dies after a prolonged battle with addiction. Jamie's tragic demise haunts Eugene for years, inspiring his later play *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, which explores Jamie's final days. The play reveals the deep emotional scars left by Jamie's self-destruction and its impact on Eugene's own struggles with addiction and loss.

1924 – A Landmark Tragedy

Eugene O'Neill continues to push the boundaries of American theater with the premiere of *Desire Under the Elms* in November. The play, which deals with dark and taboo subjects such as incest and infanticide, is hailed as the first significant tragedy in American drama. With *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill cements his reputation as a daring and innovative playwright, unafraid to tackle the most difficult aspects of human nature.

1928 – A Third Pulitzer for a Bold New Work

O'Neill reaches new heights in 1928 when he wins his third Pulitzer Prize for *Strange Interlude*, an ambitious nine-act play that chronicles the emotional life of a woman from youth to middle age. The play's exploration of complex psychological themes and its unconventional structure demonstrate O'Neill's mastery of the craft. His success with *Strange Interlude* not only brings him critical acclaim but also financial security, as the play earns him a substantial sum and is later adapted into a film.

1929 – A New Marriage and Stability

On July 22, Eugene marries Carlotta Monterey, an actress who will become his third and final wife. Unlike his previous marriages, Eugene finds stability and support in his relationship with Carlotta, who becomes his protector and caretaker as his health declines in later years. Together, they form a close bond that endures until O'Neill's death, with Carlotta playing a key role in preserving his legacy.

1931 – Ambitious New Heights

In 1931, Eugene O'Neill completes *Mourning Becomes Electra*, a monumental trilogy that adapts the Greek tragedy *Oresteia* to the setting of post-Civil War New England. This ambitious work explores themes of fate, revenge, and psychological torment, showcasing O'Neill's deepening mastery of tragedy. The trilogy is considered one of his greatest achievements and solidifies his reputation as an innovative force in American drama, blending classical influences with modern sensibilities.

1933 – The Lighter Side of O'Neill

On October 2, O'Neill's only comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!*, opens on Broadway, offering audiences a rare glimpse into the playwright's lighter and more sentimental side. The play, a nostalgic look at family life in a small American town, is a departure from the dark and introspective themes that dominate O'Neill's other works. Though it stands alone in his body of work as a comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!* demonstrates his versatility and ability to capture a different emotional tone, endearing him to a broader audience.

1936 – Nobel Prize and Global Recognition

On November 12, O'Neill is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, becoming the first—and so far, only—American dramatist to receive the honor. The Nobel Prize marks the pinnacle of O'Neill's international recognition, celebrating his contributions to

literature and his transformation of American theater. This prestigious award not only cements his legacy but also recognizes the depth and impact of his works, which continue to challenge and inspire audiences around the world.

1939 – The Tragic World of *The Iceman Cometh*

In 1939, O'Neill completes *The Iceman Cometh*, one of his most critically acclaimed tragedies. Set in a seedy New York City bar, the play delves into the shattered dreams and delusions of its characters, a group of drifters clinging to "pipe dreams." The play is a profound exploration of human despair, disillusionment, and the search for meaning, themes that resonate deeply with audiences. *The Iceman Cometh* becomes a cornerstone of O'Neill's later career, marking his return to the tragic form he mastered.

1941 – Masterpiece in the Making

O'Neill completes *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, a searing autobiographical play that is widely regarded as his greatest work. The play, which chronicles a single day in the life of the Tyrone family—a thinly veiled version of O'Neill's own family—reveals the deep emotional wounds, addictions, and struggles that haunted his parents and siblings. Written as a cathartic act of self-exploration, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is not only a personal triumph but also a towering achievement in American drama. Its raw honesty and emotional intensity make it one of the most important plays in the history of the theater.

1943 – A Family Rift

On June 16, O'Neill's daughter Oona, just 18 years old, marries film legend Charlie Chaplin, who is 54 at the time. O'Neill vehemently opposes the marriage, resulting in a permanent rift between father and daughter. O'Neill never reconciles with Oona, who goes on to have eight children with Chaplin. The estrangement from his daughter adds another layer of personal tragedy to O'Neill's later years, as he becomes increasingly isolated from his family.

1945 – O'Neill's Final Wishes

In November, O'Neill delivers the manuscript of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* to Random House with strict instructions: the play must not be published or produced until 25 years after his death. This request reflects O'Neill's deep ambivalence about exposing the painful truths of his family life, even though he recognized the play's

brilliance. The decision to withhold the play underscores O'Neill's complex relationship with his past and his desire to control how his legacy would be remembered.

1946 – *The Iceman Cometh* Returns to Broadway

On October 9, *The Iceman Cometh* premieres on Broadway. Although it marks the last Broadway production of an O'Neill play during his lifetime, its significance is profound. The play's bleak yet poignant portrayal of lost hopes and shattered illusions resonates with postwar audiences. Its return to the Broadway stage signals O'Neill's enduring influence and relevance in American theater, even as his own health begins to decline.

1948 – Family Struggles Continue

Eugene's younger son, Shane O'Neill, is arrested for heroin possession in August, a shocking development that deepens the fractures within the family. Although Shane receives a suspended sentence, Eugene never again has contact with him. This final break between father and son adds to the mounting personal tragedies in O'Neill's later years, leaving him estranged from both of his surviving children as his health continues to fail.

1950 – Tragedy Strikes Again

In September, Eugene O'Neill Jr., Eugene's eldest son, commits suicide. His note chillingly reads: "Never let it be said of O'Neill that he failed to finish a bottle." Despite their rocky relationship, Eugene Sr. is devastated by the loss, though he does not attend his son's funeral. This tragedy marks yet another emotional blow for the aging playwright, whose life is now marked by the loss of two sons, a broken marriage, and deteriorating health.

1953 – The Final Curtain

On November 27, Eugene O'Neill dies in a Boston hotel, his body weakened by a debilitating neuromuscular disorder that has robbed him of the ability to write. His death brings an end to one of the most remarkable careers in American theater. O'Neill leaves behind an extraordinary legacy: 50 plays, 35 of which were produced during his lifetime. His work continues to influence and inspire generations of playwrights and theatergoers, securing his place as one of the greatest dramatists in history.

1956 – *Long Day's Journey Into Night* Premieres

Although O'Neill had insisted that *Long Day's Journey Into Night* not be published until 25 years after his death, his widow, Carlotta, takes the manuscript to Yale University Press, and the play is published in February 1956. Later that year, it premieres at the Helen Hayes Theatre in New York. The play receives widespread acclaim and earns O'Neill a posthumous Pulitzer Prize, cementing his reputation as a literary giant. The emotionally raw portrayal of his family resonates with audiences, and the play is hailed as a masterpiece.

1957 – *A Moon for the Misbegotten* Premieres

On May 2, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, O'Neill's play about his brother Jamie's final days, debuts on Broadway. The deeply personal work revisits the complex family dynamics that had shaped much of O'Neill's earlier work. Though written two decades after Jamie's death, the play reflects O'Neill's ongoing struggle to reconcile his feelings about his brother and the impact of Jamie's self-destructive behavior. *A Moon for the Misbegotten* becomes another important entry in O'Neill's exploration of family and tragedy.

1967 – A Lost Play Resurfaces

In a surprising turn of events, *More Stately Mansions*, an unfinished manuscript that O'Neill had attempted to destroy, is discovered and produced on Broadway in 1967. Though it is promoted as a "new play by Eugene O'Neill," the work is incomplete and its production stirs controversy. Despite starring Ingrid Bergman, the play fails to achieve the success of O'Neill's earlier works. Its release raises questions about the handling of O'Neill's unfinished manuscripts and how his legacy should be preserved.

1976 – A National Historic Site for O'Neill

On October 19, President Gerald Ford signs a bill establishing the Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site at Tao House in Danville, California, where O'Neill had written some of his greatest works, including *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. The designation of Tao House as a historic site preserves the place where O'Neill created his masterpieces and ensures that future generations can visit and learn about the life and work of one of America's most important playwrights.

1979 – The Formation of the Eugene O'Neill Society

On December 29, the Eugene O'Neill Society is formed, a scholarly and professional organization dedicated to the study and promotion of O'Neill's life and works. The society plays a crucial role in preserving O'Neill's legacy, providing a platform for research, discussion, and celebration of his contributions to American theater. Its formation marks the beginning of a sustained academic interest in O'Neill's work and ensures that his plays remain a vital part of American literary and theatrical history.

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Eugene O'Neill Society

{https://www.eugeneoneillsociety.org/}

Welcome to the Eugene O'Neill International Society

The Eugene O'Neill Society is a nonprofit international association formed in 1978 to promote the study of the life and works of Eugene O'Neill, America's greatest playwright. The Society also celebrates the drama and theatre for which his work was in large part the catalyst and model for American Theatre in the 20th Century and beyond. Eugene O'Neill was awarded four Pulitzer Prizes and is the only American playwright to have received the Nobel Prize.

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Videos

[01] GREAT AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHTS: EUGENE O'NEILL
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jt4oBRGKkM0 [3:11:28]

[02] Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site Virtual Program
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jSm-xZlIG8 [52:09]

[03] Eugene O'Neill ‹‹:::›› Deserves A Closer Look
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzpqY0b_-BY [49:29]

[04] A Moon for the Misbegotten, by Eugene O'Neill
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K49TJZH3Wm4 [1:15:57]

[05] "The Oresteia and the Roots of Mourning Becomes Electra"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3Ah08CvtXQ [1:19:34]
[06] Eugene O'Neill Symposium - Beth Wynstra
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQlIVqkUI70 [55:58]

[07] Geography of Eugene O'Neill
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTojAk9IMHU [46:53]

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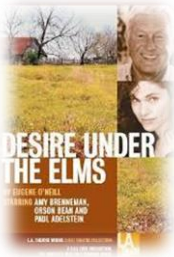

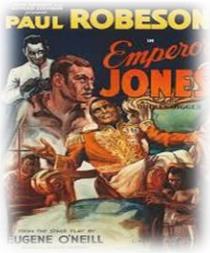

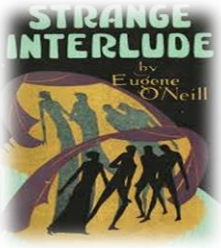

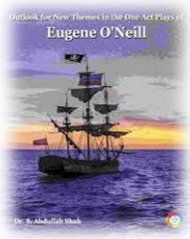

EUGENE O'NEILL
OCTOBER 16,1888 - NOVEMBER 27,1953
AMERICA'S GREATEST PLAYWRIGHT WAS BORN
ON THIS SITE THEN CALLED BARRETT HOUSE
PRESENTED BY
CIRCLE IN THE SQUARE

26 Jun 1892

6 Mar 1973

Pearl S Buck

Nobel Prize in Literature 1938

Born: 26 June 1892, Hillsboro, WV, USA
Died: 6 March 1973, Danby, VT, USA
Residence at the time of the award: USA
Prize motivation:

"for her rich and truly epic descriptions
of peasant life in China and
for her biographical masterpieces"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1938/buck/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1938, by Bo Bergman
- Literature 1938, by Torsten Fogelqvist
- Literature 1938, by Sven Hedin
- Literature 1938, by Henrik Schück
- Peace 1973, by Robert Stafford
- Peace 1973, by Hai-rang Lee
- Peace 1973, by Carlos Romulo
- Peace 1973, by Gil Puyat
- Peace 1973, by Kim Jong Pil

Submitted nominations for the Nobel Prize in

- Literature 1940, nominee: Lin Yutang
- Literature 1950, nominee: Lin Yutang
- Literature 1952, nominee: Van Wyck Brooks
- Literature 1958, nominee: Junichiro Tanizaki
- Literature 1961, nominee: Robert Frost

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Links to other sites

[01] On Pearl S. Buck from University of Pennsylvania
[02] On Pearl S. Buck from Randolph College
[03] On Pearl S. Buck from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[04] Pearl S. Buck Collection at West Virginia University
[05] On Pearl Buck from National Women's History Museum

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Award Ceremony 1938 <::> Video

A Summary

When the 1938 Nobel Prizes were awarded at the Stockholm Concert Hall, 10 December 1938, only two Nobel Laureates were present: Pearl Buck, Literature Laureate, and Enrico Fermi, Physics Laureate. Swedish King Gustav V presented the Laureates with their Nobel Diplomas and Medals.

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1938/award-video/}

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Per Hallström Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, on December 10, 1938

Pearl Buck once told how she had found her mission as interpreter to the West of the nature and being of China. She did not turn to it as a literary speciality at all; it came to her naturally.

«It is people that have always afforded me my greatest pleasure and interest», she said, «and as I live among the Chinese, it has been the Chinese people. When I am asked what sort of people they are, I cannot answer. They are not this or that, they are just people. I can no more define them than I can define my own relatives and kinsmen. I am too near to them and I have lived too intimately with them for that.»

She has been among the people of China in all their vicissitudes, in good years and in famine years, in the bloody tumults of revolutions and in the delirium of Utopias. She has associated with the educated classes and with primordially primitive peasants, who had hardly seen a Western face before they saw hers. Often she has been in deadly peril, a stranger who never thought of herself as a stranger; on the whole, her outlook retained its profound and warm humanity. With pure objectivity she has breathed life into her knowledge and given us the peasant epic which has made her world-famous, *The Good Earth* (1931).

As her hero she took a man who led the same existence as his forefathers had during countless centuries, and who possessed the same primitive soul. His virtues spring from one single root: affinity with the earth, which yields its crops in return for a man's labours.

Wang Lung is created from the same stuff as the yellow-brown earth in the fields, and with a kind of pious joy he bestows upon it every ounce of his energy. The two belong to each other in origin, and they will become one again with the death he will meet with tranquility. His work is also a duty done, and thus his conscience is at rest. Since dishonesty avails nothing in his pursuits, he has become honest. This is the sum total of his moral conceptions, and equally few are his religious ones, which are almost entirely comprehended in the cult of ancestor-worship.

He knows that man's life is a gleam of light between two darknesses; from the one behind him runs the chain of forefathers from father to son, and the chain must not be broken by him, if he is not to lose his dim hope of survival in a surmised, unknown region. For then would expire a spark of the life-fire of the race, which each individual man has to care for.

And thus the story begins with Wang Lung's marriage and his dreams of sons in the house. Of his wife, O'Lan, he does not dream, for – as is proper and fitting – he has never seen her. She is a slave at the great house in the neighbouring town and cheap

to buy, since she is said to be ugly. For that reason she has probably been left alone by the young sons of the house, and to this the bridegroom attaches great value.

Their life together is happy, for the wife proves to be an excellent helpmate, and the children soon make their appearance. She satisfies all the demands laid upon her, and she has no claims of her own. Behind her mute eyes is hidden a mute soul. She is all submission, but wise and prompt in action; a wife also in her paucity of words, springing from a philosophy of life learned in a hard school.

Success attends the two. They are able to set aside a little money, and Wang Lung's great passion, next to parenthood, his longing for more ground to cultivate, may now venture forth from subconsciousness. He is able to buy more fields, and everything promises happiness and increase.

Then comes a blow from the hand of fate; a drought descends upon the district. The good earth is changed into yellow, whirling dust. By selling land they could avert starvation, but that would be to bolt and lock the door to the future. Neither of them wishes to do that, so they set forth in company with the growing army of beggars to a city in the south, to live on the crumbs from the rich man's table.

O'Lan had made the journey once before in her childhood, when the end of it was that she was sold to save her parents and brothers.

Thanks to her experience, they accommodate themselves to the new life. Wang Lung toils as a beast of burden and the others beg with an acquired aptitude. Autumn and winter pass. With the spring, their yearning for their own land and its tilling becomes unendurable, but they have no money for the journey.

Then again fate intervenes – as natural a fate in China as drought and plague and flood. War, which is ever present somewhere in that great country, and the ways of which are as inscrutable as those of the powers of the air, stalks across the city and makes chaos of law and order. The poor plunder the homes of the rich.

Wang Lung goes with the mob without any definite motives, for his peasant soul revolts at deeds of violence, but by pure chance a handful of gold coins is almost forced into his hand. Now he can go home and begin the spring work on his rain-soaked soil. More than that, he can buy new fields; he is rich and happy.

He becomes still richer, though ultimately not happier, through the plunder acquired by O'Lan. From her days of slavery she knows something about hiding places in palaces, and she discovers a handful of precious stones. She takes them nearly as unpremeditatedly as a magpie steals glittering things, and hides them as instinctively. When her husband discovers them in her bosom, his whole world is transformed. He buys farm after farm. He becomes the leading man in the district, no longer peasant but lord, and his character changes colour. Simplicity and

harmony with the earth vanish. In their place comes, slowly but surely, a curse for the desertion.

Wang Lung no longer has any real peace in his lordly leisure, with a young concubine in the house and O'Lan pushed into a dark corner, to die there when she has worn herself out.

The sons are not attractive figures. The eldest devotes himself to an empty life of indulgence, the second is swallowed up by greed for gold as a merchant and usurer. The youngest becomes one of the «war lords» who drain the unhappy country. Around them the Middle Empire is torn asunder in the tumult of new creation, which has become so agonizing in our days.

The trilogy does not carry us so far, however; it concludes with a sort of reconciliation between the third generation and the good earth. One of Wang Lung's grandsons, a man educated in the West, returns to the family estate and applies the knowledge he has acquired to the improvement of the conditions of work and life among the peasants.

The rest of the family live without roots in that conflict between old and new which Pearl Buck has described in other works – mostly in the tone of tragedy.

Of the many problems in this novel, the most serious and sombre one is the position of the Chinese woman. From the very beginning it is on this point that the writer's pathos emerges most strongly, and amid the calm of the epic work it constantly makes itself felt. An early episode in the work gives the most poignant expression of what a Chinese woman has been worth since time immemorial. It is given with impressive emphasis, and also with a touch of humour which is naturally rare in this book. In a moment of happiness, with his little first-born son dressed in fine clothes on his arm, and seeing the future bright before him, Wang Lung is on the point of breaking into boastful words but restrains himself in sudden terror. There, under the open sky, he had almost challenged the invisible spirits and drawn their evil glances upon himself He tries to avert the menace by hiding his son under his coat and saying in a loud voice,«What a pity that our child is a girl, which no one wants, and is pitted with smallpox into the bargain! Let us pray that it may die!» And O'Lan joins in the comedy and acquiesces – probably without thinking at all.

In reality the spirits need not waste their glances on a girl child. Its lot is hard enough in any case. It is Pearl Buck's female characters which make the strongest impression. There is O'Lan with her scanty words, which carry all the more weight. Her whole life is portrayed in equally scanty but telling lines.

Quite a different figure is the chief character in the novel *The Mother* (1934). She is not referred to by any other designation, as if to indicate that her whole destiny is expressed in that word. She is, however, vividly individualized, a brave, energetic, strong character, of a more modern type than O'Lan's, perhaps, and without her

slave temperament. The husband soon deserts his home, but she keeps it together for her children. The whole story ends in sorrow, but not in defeat. The mother cannot be crushed, not even when her younger son is beheaded as a revolutionary, and she has to seek a stranger's grave to weep by, for he has none. Just then a grandson is born, and she again has someone to love and sacrifice herself for. The mother is the most finished of Pearl Buck's Chinese female figures, and the book is one of her best. But in character descriptions and the storyteller's art she is at her best in the two biographies of her parents, *The Exile* (1936) and *Fighting Angel* (1936). These should be called classics in the fullest sense of the word; they will endure, for they are full of life. In this respect the models from which the portraits are drawn are of great significance.

One seldom feels any great sense of gratitude for the company proffered in contemporary novels, and it is gladly forgotten. The characters have no great wealth of qualities, and the writer puts forth all his powers to lessen them, often by a persistent analysis with foregone results.

Here, however, one encounters two consummate characters, living unselfish lives of action, free from brooding and vacillation. They are profoundly unlike each other, and the fact that they are thrown together in a common struggle in a hard and strange world often leads to great tragedy-but not to defeat: they stand erect even to the very last. There is a spirit of heroism in both stories.

The mother, Carie, is richly gifted, brave and warm, of a genuine nature, harmonious amid ever-straining forces. She is tested to the utmost in sorrows and dangers; she loses many children because of the harshness of the conditions of life, and at times a terrible death threatens her in those troubled times. It is almost as hard for her to witness the never-ending suffering around her. She does what she can to mitigate it, and that is not a little, but no power is sufficient for such a task.

Even inwardly she passes through a hard and unceasing struggle. In her calling, and with her nature, she needs more than the conviction of faith. It is not enough for her that she has dedicated herself to God; she must also feel that the sacrifice has been accepted. But the sign of this, for which she begs and prays, never comes. She is compelled to persist in an untiring endeavour to find God and to content herself with trying to be good without divine help.

However, she preserves her spiritual health, her love for the life which has shown her so much that is terrible, and her eye for the beauty the world has to offer; she even retains her happiness and her humour. She resembles a fresh fountain springing from the heart of life.

The daughter tells her story with rare and lively perspicuity. The biography is precise in regard to the course of events, but creative imagination plays its part in the various episodes and in the description of the inner life of the character. Nothing is falsified, for this imagination is intuitive and true.

The language has vivid spontaneity; it is clear and suffused with a tender and soulful humour. There is, however, a flaw in the story. The daughter's devotion to her mother makes it impossible for her to do justice to her father. In his family life his limitations were obvious, limitations sharp and at times painful. As a preacher and soldier of Christ he was without blemish, in many respects even a great character; but he ought to have lived his life alone, free of the familial duties he hardly found time to notice, duties which in any case weighed lightly with him against his all-absorbing calling. Thus he was of little help to his wife, and in her biography he could not be fully understood.

This was accomplished, however, in another book, whose title is the key to his life and being: *Fighting Angel*. Andrew did not possess his wife's richly composite nature; his was narrow but deep, and as bright as a gleaming sword. He devoted every thought to his goal of opening the way to salvation for the heathens. Everything was insignificant compared to that. What Carie prayed for in vain, communion with God, he possessed wholly and unshakeably in the firm conceptions of his Biblical faith. With this faith he walked like a conqueror, further than any other in the immense heathen country, he endured all hardships without noticing them, and he encountered threats and dangers in the same manner. For the poor, blind, strange brown people he felt tenderness and love. Among them his stern nature broke into blossom. When he had won their souls to a confession of faith, he did not doubt the genuineness of the confession; with the naivete of a child, he accepted it as good. The door to God, always denied them before, had been opened to them, and to weigh them and judge them was now in the hands of Him who knows best. They had been given their possibility of salvation, and for Andrew it was urgent to give this possibility to all he could reach in that immense country, where thousands were dying every hour. His enthusiasm burned, and his work had something of genius in its magnitude and depth.

He strained his forces to the utmost in never-ending action, and the repose he allowed himself was the mystic's abandonment to the infinite amid ardent prayers. The whole of his life was a flame which rose straight and high, in spite of all storms; it could not be judged by ordinary conceptions. The daughter, whose portrait conceals none of his repellent features, maintained pure reverence before the nobility of the whole. One is profoundly thankful for both these perfectly executed pictures – each in its way so rare.

By awarding this year's Prize to Pearl Buck for the notable works which pave the way to a human sympathy passing over widely separated racial boundaries and for the studies of human ideals which are a great and living art of portraiture, the Swedish Academy feels that it acts in harmony and accord with the aim of Alfred Nobel's dreams for the future.

Mrs. Walsh, I have attempted a short survey of your work, indeed hardly necessary here, where the audience is so well acquainted with your remarkable books.

I hope, though, that I have been able to give some idea of their trend, toward opening a faraway and foreign world to deeper human insight and sympathy within

our Western sphere – a grand and difficult task, requiring all your idealism and greatheartedness to fulfil as you have done.

May I now ask you to receive from the hands of His Majesty the King the Nobel Prize in Literature, conferred upon you by the Swedish Academy.

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Nobel Prize lecture

Nobel Lecture, December 12, 1938

The Chinese Novel

Members of the Swedish Academy, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I came to consider what I should say today it seemed that it would be wrong not to speak of China. And this is none the less true because I am an American by birth and by ancestry and though I live now in my own country and shall live there, since there I belong. But it is the Chinese and not the American novel which has shaped my own efforts in writing. My earliest knowledge of story, of how to tell and write stories, came to me in China. It would be ingratitude on my part not to recognize this today. And yet it would be presumptuous to speak before you on the subject of the Chinese novel for a reason wholly personal. There is another reason why I feel that I may properly do so. It is that I believe the Chinese novel has an illumination for the Western novel and for the Western novelist.

When I say Chinese novel, I mean the indigenous Chinese novel, and not that hybrid product, the novels of modern Chinese writers who have been too strongly under foreign influence while they were yet ignorant of the riches of their own country.

The novel in China was never an art and was never so considered, nor did any Chinese novelist think of himself as an artist. The Chinese novel its history, its scope, its place in the life of the people, so vital a place, must be viewed in the strong light of this one fact. It is a fact no doubt strange to you, a company of modern Western scholars who today so generously recognize the novel.

But in China art and the novel have always been widely separated. There, literature as an art was the exclusive property of the scholars, an art they made and made for each other according to their own rules, and they found no place in it for the novel. And they held a powerful place, those Chinese scholars. Philosophy and religion and letters and literature, by arbitrary classical rules, they possessed them all, for they alone possessed the means of learning, since they alone knew how to read and write. They were powerful enough to be feared even by emperors, so that emperors devised a way of keeping them enslaved by their own learning, and made the official examinations the only means to political advancement, those incredibly difficult

examinations which ate up a man's whole life and thought in preparing for them, and kept him too busy with memorizing and copying the dead and classical past to see the present and its wrongs. In that past the scholars found their rules of art. But the novel was not there, and they did not see it being created before their eyes, for the people created the novel, and what living people were doing did not interest those who thought of literature as an art. If scholars ignored the people, however, the people, in turn, laughed at the scholars. They made innumerable jokes about them, of which this is a fair sample: One day a company of wild beasts met on a hillside for a hunt. They bargained with each other to go out and hunt all day and meet again at the end of the day to share what they had killed. At the end of the day, only the tiger returned with nothing. When he was asked how this happened he replied very disconsolately, «At dawn I met a schoolboy, but he was, I feared, too callow for your tastes. I met no more until noon, when I found a priest. But I let him go, knowing him to be full of nothing but wind. The day went on and I grew desperate, for I passed no one. Then as dark came on I found a scholar. But I knew there was no use in bringing him back since he would be so dry and hard that he would break our teeth if we tried them on him.»

The scholar as a class has long been a figure of fun for the Chinese people. He is frequently to be found in their novels, and always he is the same, as indeed he is in life, for a long study of the same dead classics and their formal composition has really made all Chinese scholars look alike, as well as think alike. We have no class to parallel him in the West – individuals, perhaps, only. But in China he was a class. Here he is, composite, as the people see him: a small shrunken figure with a bulging forehead, a pursed mouth, a nose at once snub and pointed, small inconspicuous eyes behind spectacles, a high pedantic voice, always announcing rules that do not matter to anyone but himself, a boundless self-conceit, a complete scorn not only of the common people but of all other scholars, a figure in long shabby robes, moving with a swaying haughty walk, when he moved at all. He was not to be seen except at literary gatherings, for most of the time he spent reading dead literature and trying to write more like it. He hated anything fresh or original, for he could not catalogue it into any of the styles he knew. If he could not catalogue it, he was sure it was not great, and he was confident that only he was right. If he said, «Here is art», he was convinced it was not to be found anywhere else, for what he did not recognize did not exist. And as he could never catalogue the novel into what he called literature, so for him it did not exist as literature.

Yao Hai, one of the greatest of Chinese literary critics, in 1776 enumerated the kinds of writing which comprise the whole of literature. They are essays, government commentaries, biographies, epitaphs, epigrams, poetry, funeral eulogies, and histories. No novels, you perceive, although by that date the Chinese novel had already reached its glorious height, after centuries of development among the common Chinese people. Nor does that vast compilation of Chinese literature, *Ssu Ku Chuen Shu*, made in 1772 by the order of the great Emperor Ch'ien Lung, contain the novel in the encyclopedia of its literature proper.

No, happily for the Chinese novel, it was not considered by the scholars as literature. Happily, too, for the novelist! Man and book, they were free from the criticisms of those scholars and their requirements of art, their techniques of expression and their talk of literary significances and all that discussion of what is and is not art, as if art

were an absolute and not the changing thing it is, fluctuating even within decades! The Chinese novel was free. It grew as it liked out of its own soil, the common people, nurtured by that heartiest of sunshine, popular approval, and untouched by the cold and frosty winds of the scholar's art. Emily Dickinson, an American poet, once wrote, «Nature is a haunted house, but art is a house that tries to be haunted». «Nature», she said,

Is what we see,
Nature is what we know
But have no art to say –
So impatient our wisdom is,
To her simplicity.

No, if the Chinese scholars ever knew of the growth of the novel, it was only to ignore it the more ostentatiously. Sometimes, unfortunately, they found themselves driven to take notice, because youthful emperors found novels pleasant to read. Then these poor scholars were hard put to it. But they discovered the phrase «social significance», and they wrote long literary treatises to prove that a novel was not a novel but a document of social significance. Social significance is a term recently discovered by the most modern of literary young men and women in the United States, but the old scholars of China knew it a thousand years ago, when they, too, demanded that the novel should have social significance, if it were to be recognized as an art.

But for the most part the old Chinese scholar reasoned thus about the novel:

Literature is art.
All art has social significance.
This book has no social significance.
Therefore it is not literature.

And so the novel in China was not literature.

In such a school was I trained. I grew up believing that the novel has nothing to do with pure literature. So I was taught by scholars. The art of literature, so I was taught, is something devised by men of learning. Out of the brains of scholars came rules to control the rush of genius, that wild fountain which has its source in deepest life. Genius, great or less, is the spring, and art is the sculptured shape, classical or modern, into which the waters must be forced, if scholars and critics were to be served. But the people of China did not so serve. The waters of the genius of story gushed out as they would, however the natural rocks allowed and the trees persuaded, and only common people came and drank and found rest and pleasure.

For the novel in China was the peculiar product of the common people. And it was solely their property. The very language of the novel was their own language, and not the classical Wen-li, which was the language of literature and the scholars. Wen-li bore somewhat the same resemblance to the language of the people as the ancient English of Chaucer does to the English of today, although ironically enough, at one time Wen-li, too, was a vernacular. But the scholars never kept pace with the living,

changing speech of the people. They clung to an old vernacular until they had made it classic, while the running language of the people went on and left them far behind. Chinese novels, then, are in the «Pei Hua», or simple talk, of the people, and this in itself was offensive to the old scholars because it resulted in a style so full of easy flow and readability that it had no technique of expression in it, the scholars said.

I should pause to make an exception of certain scholars who came to China from India, bearing as their gift a new religion, Buddhism. In the West, Puritanism was for a long time the enemy of the novel. But in the Orient the Buddhists were wiser. When they came into China, they found literature already remote from the people and dying under the formalism of that period known in history as the Six Dynasties. The professional men of literature were even then absorbed not so much in what they had to say as in pairing into couplets the characters of their essays and their poems, and already they scorned all writing which did not conform to their own rules. Into this confined literary atmosphere came the Buddhist translators with their great treasures of the freed spirit. Some of them were Indian, but some were Chinese. They said frankly that their aim was not to conform to the ideas of style of the literary men, but to make clear and simple to common people what they had to teach. They put their religious teachings into the common language, the language which the novel used, and because the people loved story, they took story and made it a means of teaching. The preface of Fah Shu Ching, one of the most famous of Buddhist books, says, «When giving the words of gods, these words should be given forth simply.» This might be taken as the sole literary creed of the Chinese novelist, to whom, indeed, gods were men and men were gods.

For the Chinese novel was written primarily to amuse the common people. And when I say amuse I do not mean only to make them laugh, though laughter is also one of the aims of the Chinese novel. I mean amusement in the sense of absorbing and occupying the whole attention of the mind. I mean enlightening that mind by pictures of life and what that life means. I mean encouraging the spirit not by rule-of-thumb talk about art, but by stories about the people in every age, and thus presenting to people simply themselves. Even the Buddhists who came to tell about gods found that people understood gods better if they saw them working through ordinary folk like themselves.

But the real reason why the Chinese novel was written in the vernacular was because the common people could not read and write and the novel had to be written so that when it was read aloud it could be understood by persons who could communicate only through spoken words. In a village of two hundred souls perhaps only one man could read. And on holidays or in the evening when the work was done he read aloud to the people from some story. The rise of the Chinese novel began in just this simple fashion. After a while people took up a collection of pennies in somebody's cap or in a farm wife's bowl because the reader needed tea to wet his throat, or perhaps to pay him for time he would otherwise have spent at his silk loom or his rush weaving. If the collections grew big enough he gave up some of his regular work and became a professional storyteller. And the stories he read were the beginnings of novels. There were not many such stories written down, not nearly enough to last year in and year out for people who had by nature, as the Chinese have, a strong love for dramatic

story. So the storyteller began to increase his stock. He searched the dry annals of the history which the scholars had written, and with his fertile imagination, enriched by long acquaintance with common people, he clothed long-dead figures with new flesh and made them live again; he found stories of court life and intrigue and names of imperial favorites who had brought dynasties to ruin; he found, as he traveled from village to village, strange tales from his own times which he wrote down when he heard them. People told him of experiences they had had and he wrote these down, too, for other people. And he embellished them, but not with literary turns and phrases, for the people cared nothing for these. No, he kept his audiences always in mind and he found that the style which they loved best was one which flowed easily along, clearly and simply, in the short words which they themselves used every day, with no other technique than occasional bits of description, only enough to give vividness to a place or a person, and never enough to delay the story. Nothing must delay the story. Story was what they wanted.

And when I say story, I do not mean mere pointless activity, not crude action alone. The Chinese are too mature for that. They have always demanded of their novel character above all else. *Shui Hu Chuan* they have considered one of their three greatest novels, not primarily because it is full of the flash and fire of action, but because it portrays so distinctly one hundred and eight characters that each is to be seen separate from the others. Often I have heard it said of that novel in tones of delight, «When anyone of the hundred and eight begins to speak, we do not need to be told his name. By the way the words come from his mouth we know who he is.» Vividness of character portrayal, then, is the first quality which the Chinese people have demanded of their novels, and after it, that such portrayal shall be by the character's own action and words rather than by the author's explanation.

Curiously enough, while the novel was beginning thus humbly in teahouses, in villages and lowly city streets out of stories told to the common people by a common and unlearned man among them, in imperial palaces it was beginning, too, and in much the same unlearned fashion. It was an old custom of emperors, particularly if the dynasty were a foreign one, to employ persons called «imperial ears», whose only duty was to come and go among the people in the streets of cities and villages and to sit among them in teahouses, disguised in common clothes and listen to what was talked about there. The original purpose of this was, of course, to hear of any discontent among the emperor's subjects, and more especially to find out if discontents were rising to the shape of those rebellions which preceded the fall of every dynasty.

But emperors were very human and they were not often learned scholars. More often, indeed, they were only spoiled and willful men. The «imperial ears. had opportunity to hear all sorts of strange and interesting stories, and they found that their royal masters were more frequently interested in these stories than they were in politics. So when they came back to make their reports, they flattered the emperor and sought to gain favor by telling him what he liked to hear, shut up as he was in the Forbidden City, away from life. They told him the strange and interesting things which common people did, who were free, and after a while they took to writing down what they heard in order to save memory. And I do not doubt that if messengers between the emperor and the people carried stories in one direction, they carried them in the

other, too, and to the people they told stories about the emperor and what he said and did, and how he quarrelled with the empress who bore him no sons, and how she intrigued with the chief eunuch to poison the favorite concubine, all of which delighted the Chinese because it proved to them, the most democratic of peoples, that their emperor was after all only a common fellow like themselves and that he, too, had his troubles, though he was the Son of Heaven. Thus there began another important source for the novel that was to develop with such form and force, though still always denied its right to exist by the professional man of letters.

From such humble and scattered beginnings, then, came the Chinese novel, written always in the vernacular, and dealing with all which interested the people, with legend and with myth, with love and intrigue, with brigands and wars, with everything, indeed, which went to make up the life of the people, high and low.

Nor was the novel in China shaped, as it was in the West, by a few great persons. In China the novel has always been more important than the novelist. There has been no Chinese Defoe, no Chinese Fielding or Smollett, no Austin or Brontë or Dickens or Thackeray, or Meredith or Hardy, any more than Balzac or Flaubert. But there were and are novels as great as the novels in any other country in the world, as great as any could have written, had he been born in China. Who then wrote these novels of China?

That is what the modern literary men of China now, centuries too late, are trying to discover. Within the last twenty-five years literary critics, trained in the universities of the West, have begun to discover their own neglected novels. But the novelists who wrote them they cannot discover. Did one man write *Shui Hu Chuan*, or did it grow to its present shape, added to, rearranged, deepened and developed by many minds and many a hand, in different centuries? Who can now tell? They are dead. They lived in their day and wrote what in their day they saw and heard, but of themselves they have told nothing. The author of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* in a far later century says in the preface to his book, «It is not necessary to know the times of Han and T'ang – it is necessary to tell only of my own times.»

They told of their own times and they lived in a blessed obscurity. They read no reviews of their novels, no treatises as to whether or not what they did was well done according to the rules of scholarship. It did not occur to them that they must reach the high thin air which scholars breathed nor – did they consider the stuff of which greatness is made, according to the scholars. They wrote as it pleased them to write and as they were able. Sometimes they wrote unwittingly well and sometimes unwittingly they wrote not so well. They died in the same happy obscurity and now they are lost in it and not all the scholars of China, gathered too late to do them honor, can raise them up again. They are long past the possibility of literary post-mortems. But what they did remains after them because it is the common people of China who keep alive the great novels, illiterate people who have passed the novel, not so often from hand to hand as from mouth to mouth.

In the preface to one of the later editions of *Shui Hu Chuan*, Shih Nai An, an author who had much to do with the making of that novel, writes, «What I speak of I wish

people to understand easily. Whether the reader is good or evil, learned or unlearned, anyone can read this book. Whether or not the book is well done is not important enough to cause anyone to worry. Alas, I am born to die. How can I know what those who come after me who read my book will think of it? I cannot even know what I myself, born into another incarnation, will think of it. I do not know if I myself then can even read. Why therefore should I care?»

Strangely enough, there were certain scholars who envied the freedom of obscurity, and who, burdened with certain private sorrows which they dared not tell anyone, or who perhaps wanting only a holiday from the weariness of the sort of art they had themselves created, wrote novels, too under assumed and humble names. And when they did so they put aside pedantry and wrote as simply and naturally as any common novelist.

For the novelist believed that he should not be conscious of techniques. He should write as his material demanded. If a novelist became known for a particular style or technique, to that extent he ceased to be a good novelist and became a literary technician.

A good novelist, or so I have been taught in China, should be above all else *tse ran*, that is, natural, unaffected, and so flexible and variable as to be wholly at the command of the material that flows through him. His whole duty is only to sort life as it flows through him, and in the vast fragmentariness of time and space and event to discover essential and inherent order and rhythm and shape. We should never be able, merely by reading pages, to know who wrote them, for when the style of a novelist becomes fixed, that style becomes his prison. The Chinese novelists varied their writing to accompany like music their chosen themes.

These Chinese novels are not perfect according to Western standards. They are not always planned from beginning to end, nor are they compact, any more than life is planned or compact. They are often too long, too full of incident, too crowded with character, a medley of fact and fiction as to material, and a medley of romance and realism as to method, so that an impossible event of magic or dream may be described with such exact semblance of detail that one is compelled to belief against all reason. The earliest novels are full of folklore, for the people of those times thought and dreamed in the ways of folklore. But no one can understand the mind of China today who has not read these novels, for the novels have shaped the present mind, too, and the folklore persists in spite of all that Chinese diplomats and Western-trained scholars would have us believe to the contrary. The essential mind of China is still that mind of which George Russell wrote when he said of the Irish mind, so strangely akin to the Chinese,« that mind which in its folk imagination believes anything. It creates ships of gold with masts of silver and white cities by the sea and rewards and faeries, and when that vast folk mind turns to politics it is ready to believe anything.»

Out of this folk mind, turned into stories and crowded with thousands of years of life, grew, literally, the Chinese novel. For these novels changed as they grew. If, as I have said, there are no single names attached beyond question to the great novels of China, it is because no one hand wrote them. From beginning as a mere tale, a story grew

through succeeding versions, into a structure built by many hands. I might mention as an example the well-known story, *The White Snake*, or *Pei She Chuan*, first written in the T'ang dynasty by an unknown author. It was then a tale of the simple supernatural whose hero was a great white snake. In the next version in the following century, the snake has become a vampire woman who is an evil force. But the third version contains a more gentle and human touch. The vampire becomes a faithful wife who aids her husband and gives him a son. The story thus adds not only new character but new quality, and ends not as the supernatural tale it began but as a novel of human beings.

So in early periods of Chinese history, many books must be called not so much novels as source books for novels, the sort of books into which Shakespeare, had they been open to him, might have dipped with both hands to bring up pebbles to make into jewels. Many of these books have been lost, since they were not considered valuable. But not all – early stories of Han, written so vigorously that to this day it is said they run like galloping horses, and tales of the troubled dynasties following – not all were lost. Some have persisted. In the Ming dynasty, in one way or another, many of them were represented in the great collection known as *T'ai P'ing Kuan Shi*, wherein are tales of superstition and religion, of mercy and goodness and reward for evil and well doing, tales of dreams and miracles, of dragons and gods and goddesses and priests, of tigers and foxes and transmigration and resurrection from the dead. Most of these early stories had to do with supernatural events, of gods born of virgins, of men walking as gods, as the Buddhist influence grew strong. There are miracles and allegories, such as the pens of poor scholars bursting into flower, dreams leading men and women into strange and fantastic lands of Gulliver, or the magic wand that floated an altar made of iron. But stories mirrored each age. The stories of Han were vigorous and dealt often with the affairs of the nation, and centered on some great man or hero. Humor was strong in this golden age, a racy, earthy, lusty humor, such as was to be found, for instance, in a book of tales entitled *Siao Ling*, presumed to have been collected, if not partly written, by Han Tang Suan. And then the scenes changed, as that golden age faded, though it was never to be forgotten, so that to this day the Chinese like to call themselves sons of Han. With the succeeding weak and corrupt centuries, the very way the stories were written became honeyed and weak, and their subjects slight, or as the Chinese say, «In the days of the Six Dynasties, they wrote of small things, of a woman, a waterfall, or a bird.»

If the Han dynasty was golden, then the T'ang dynasty was silver, and silver were the love stories for which it was famous. It was an age of love, when a thousand stories clustered about the beautiful Yang Kuei Fei and her scarcely less beautiful predecessor in the emperor's favor, Mei Fei. These love stories of T'ang come very near sometimes to fulfilling in their unity and complexity the standards of the Western novel. There are rising action and crisis and dénouement, implicit if not expressed. The Chinese say, «We must read the stories of T'ang, because though they deal with small matters, yet they are written in so moving a manner that the tears come.

It is not surprising that most of these love stories deal not with love that ends in marriage or is contained in marriage, but with love outside the marriage relationship. Indeed, it is significant that when marriage is the theme the story nearly always ends

in tragedy. Two famous stories, *Pei Li Shi* and *Chiao Fang Chi*, deal entirely with extramarital love, and are written apparently to show the superiority of the courtesans, who could read and write and sing and were clever and beautiful besides, beyond the ordinary wife who was, as the Chinese say even today, «a yellow-faced woman », and usually illiterate.

So strong did this tendency become that officialdom grew alarmed at the popularity of such stories among the common people, and they were denounced as revolutionary and dangerous because it was thought they attacked that foundation of Chinese civilization, the family system. A reactionary tendency was not lacking, such as is to be seen in *Hui Chen Chi*, one of the earlier forms of a famous later work, the story of the young scholar who loved the beautiful Ying Ying and who renounced her, saying prudently as he went away, «All extraordinary women are dangerous. They destroy themselves and others. They have ruined even emperors. I am not an emperor and I had better give her up » – which he did, to the admiration of all wise men. And to him the modest Ying Ying replied, «If you possess me and leave me, it is your right. I do not reproach you.» But five hundred years later the sentimentality of the Chinese popular heart comes forth and sets the thwarted romance right again. In this last version of the story the author makes Chang and Ying Ying husband and wife and says in closing, «This is in the hope that all the lovers of the world may be united in happy marriage.» And as time goes in China, five hundred years is not long to wait for a happy ending.

This story, by the way, is one of China's most famous. It was repeated in the Sung dynasty in a poetic form by Chao Teh Liang, under the title *The Reluctant Butterfly*, and again in the Yuan dynasty by Tung Chai-yuen as a drama to be sung, entitled *Suh Hsi Hsiang*. In the Ming dynasty, with two versions intervening, it appears as Li Reh Hua's *Nan Hsi Hsiang Chi*, written in the southern metrical form called «ts'e», and so to the last and most famous *Hsi Hsiang Chi*. Even children in China know the name of Chang Sen.

If I seem to emphasize the romances of the T'ang period, it is because romance between man and woman is the chief gift of T'ang to the novel, and not because there were no other stories. There were many novels of a humorous and satirical nature and one curious type of story which concerned itself with cockfighting, an important pastime of that age and particularly in favor at court. One of the best of these tales is *Tung Chen Lao Fu Chuan*, by Ch'en Hung, which tells how Chia Chang, a famous cockfighter, became so famous that he was loved by emperor and people alike.

But time and the stream pass on. The novel form really begins to be clear in the Sung dynasty, and in the Yuan dynasty it flowers into that height which was never again surpassed and only equalled, indeed, by the single novel *Hung Lou Meng*, or *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, in the Ts'ing dynasty. It is as though for centuries the novel had been developing unnoticed and from deep roots among the people, spreading into trunk and branch and twig and leaf to burst into this flowering in the Yuan dynasty, when the young Mongols brought into the old country they had conquered their vigorous, hungry, untutored minds and demanded to be fed. Such minds could not be fed with the husks of the old classical literature, and they turned therefore the more eagerly to the drama and the novel, and in this new life, in the sunshine of

imperial favor, though still not with literary favor, there came two of China's three great novels, *Shui Hu Chuan* and *San Kuo-Hung Lou Meng* being the third.

I wish I could convey to you what these three novels mean and have meant to the Chinese people. But I can think of nothing comparable to them in Western literature. We have not in the history of our novel so clear a moment to which we can point and say, «There the novel is at its height.» These three are the vindication of that literature of the common people, the Chinese novel. They stand as completed monuments of that popular literature, if not of letters. They, too, were ignored by men of letters and banned by censors and damned in succeeding dynasties as dangerous, revolutionary, decadent. But they lived on, because people read them and told them as stories and sang them as songs and ballads and acted them as dramas, until at last grudgingly even the scholars were compelled to notice them and to begin to say they were not novels at all but allegories, and if they were allegories perhaps then they could be looked upon as literature after all, though the people paid no heed to such theories and never read the long treatises which scholars wrote to prove them. They rejoiced in the novels they had made as novels and for no purpose except for joy in story and in story through which they could express themselves.

And indeed the people had made them. *Shui Hu Chuan*, though the modern versions carry the name of Shi Nai An as author, was written by no one man. Out of a handful of tales centering in the Sung dynasty about a band of robbers there grew this great, structured novel. Its beginnings were in history. The original lair which the robbers held still exists in Shantung, or did until very recent times. Those times of the thirteenth century of our Western era were, in China, sadly distorted. The dynasty under the emperor Huei Chung was falling into decadence and disorder. The rich grew richer and the poor poorer and when none other came forth to set this right, these righteous robbers came forth.

I cannot here tell you fully of the long growth of this novel, nor of its changes at many hands. Shih Nai An, it is said, found it in rude form in an old book shop and took it home and rewrote it. After him the story was still told and re-told. Five or six versions of it today have importance, one with a hundred chapters entitled *Chung I Shui Hu*, one of a hundred and twenty-seven chapters, and one of a hundred chapters. The original version attributed to Shih Nai An, had a hundred and twenty chapters, but the one most used today has only seventy. This is the version arranged in the Ming dynasty by the famous Ching Shen T'an, who said that it was idle to forbid his son to read the book and therefore presented the lad with a copy revised by himself, knowing that no boy could ever refrain from reading it. There is also a version written under official command, when officials found that nothing could keep the people from reading *Shui Hu*. This official version is entitled *Tung K'ou Chi*, or, *Laying Waste the Robbers*, and it tells of the final defeat of the robbers by the state army and their destruction. But the common people of China are nothing if not independent. They have never adopted the official version, and their own form of the novel still stands. It is a struggle they know all too well, the struggle of everyday people against a corrupt officialdom.

I might add that *Shui Hu Chuan* is in partial translation in French under the title *Les Chevaliers Chinois*, and the seventy-chapter version is in complete English translation by myself under the title *All Men Are Brothers*. The original title, *Shui Hu Chuan*, in

English is meaningless, denoting merely the watery margins of the famous marshy lake which was the robbers' lair. To Chinese the words invoke instant century-old memory, but not to us.

This novel has survived everything and in this new day in China has taken on an added significance. The Chinese Communists have printed their own edition of it with a preface by a famous Communist and have issued it anew as the first Communist literature of China. The proof of the novel's greatness is in this timelessness. It is as true today as it was dynasties ago. The people of China still march across its pages, priests and courtesans, merchants and scholars, women good and bad, old and young, and even naughty little boys. The only figure lacking is that of the modern scholar trained in the West, holding his Ph.D. diploma in his hand. But be sure that if he had been alive in China when the final hand laid down the brush upon the pages of that book, he, too, would have been there in all the pathos and humor of his new learning, so often useless and inadequate and laid like a patch too small upon an old robe.

The Chinese say «The young should not read *Shui Hu* and the old should not read *San Kuo*.» This is because the young might be charmed into being robbers and the old might be led into deeds too vigorous for their years. For if *Shui Hu Chuan* is the great social document of Chinese life, *Sa Kuo* is the document of wars and statesmanship, and in its turn *Hung Lou Meng* is the document of family life and human love.

The history of the *San Kuo* or *Three Kingdoms* shows the same architectural structure and the same doubtful authorship as *Shui Hu*. The story begins with three friends swearing eternal brotherhood in the Han dynasty and ends ninety-seven years later in the succeeding period of the Six Dynasties. It is a novel rewritten in its final form by a man named Lo Kuan Chung, thought to be a pupil of Shih Nai An, and one who perhaps even shared with Shih Nai An in the writing, too, of *Shui Hu Chuan*. But this is a Chinese Baconand-Shakespeare controversy which has no end.

Lo Kuan Chung was born in the late Yuan dynasty and lived on into the Ming. He wrote many dramas, but he is more famous for his novels, of which *San Kuo* is easily the best. The version of this novel now most commonly used in China is the one revised in the time of K'ang Hsi by Mao Chen Kan, who revised as well as criticised the book. He changed, added and omitted material, as for example when he added the story of Suan Fu Ren, the wife of one of the chief characters. He altered even the style. If *Shui Hu Chuan* has importance today as a novel of the people in their struggle for liberty, *San Kuo* has importance because it gives in such detail the science and art of war as the Chinese conceive it, so differently, too, from our own. The guerillas, who are today China's most effective fighting units against Japan, are peasants who know San Kuo by heart, if not from their own reading, at least from hours spent in the idleness of winter days or long summer evenings when they sat listening to the storytellers describe how the warriors of the Three Kingdoms fought their battles. It is these ancient tactics of war which the guerillas trust today. What a warrior must be and how he must attack and retreat, how retreat when the enemy advances, how advance when the enemy retreats – all this had its source in this novel, so well known to every common man and boy of China.

Hung Lou Meng, or *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, the latest and most modern of these three greatest of Chinese novels, was written originally as an autobiographical novel by Ts'ao Hsüeh Ching, an official highly in favor during the Manchu regime and indeed considered by the Manchus as one of themselves. There were then eight military groups among the Manchus, and Tstao Hsüeh Ching belonged to them all. He never finished his novel, and the last forty chapters were added by another man, probably named Kao O. The thesis that Ts'ao Hsüeh Ching was telling the story of his own life has been in modern times elaborated by Hu Shih, and in earlier times by Yuan Mei. Be this as it may, the original title of the book was *Shih T'ou Chi*, and it came out of Peking about 1765 of the Western era, and in five or six years, an incredibly short time in China, it was famous everywhere. Printing was still expensive when it appeared, and the book became known by the method that is called in China, «You-lend-me-a-book-and-I-lend-you-a-book».

The story is simple in its theme but complex in implication, in character study and in its portrayal of human emotions. It is almost a pathological study, this story of a great house, once wealthy and high in imperial favor, so that indeed one of its members was an imperial concubine. But the great days are over when the book begins. The family is already declining. Its wealth is being dissipated and the last and only son, Chia Pao Yü, is being corrupted by the decadent influences within his own home, although the fact that he was a youth of exceptional quality at birth is established by the symbolism of a piece of jade found in his mouth. The preface begins, «Heaven was once broken and when it was mended, a bit was left unused, and this became the famous jade of Chia Pao Yü.» Thus does the interest in the supernatural persist in the Chinese people; it persists even today as a part of Chinese life.

This novel seized hold of the people primarily because it portrayed the problems of their own family system, the absolute power of women in the home, the too great power of the matriarchy, the grandmother, the mother, and even the bondmaids, so often young and beautiful and fatally dependent, who became too frequently the playthings of the sons of the house and ruined them and were ruined by them. Women reigned supreme in the Chinese house, and because they were wholly confined in its walls and often illiterate, they ruled to the hurt of all. They kept men children, and protected them from hardship and effort when they should not have been so protected. Such a one was Chia Pao Yü, and we follow him to his tragic end in *Hung Lou Meng*.

I cannot tell you to what lengths of allegory scholars went to explain away this novel when they found that again even the emperor was reading it and that its influence was so great everywhere among the people. I do not doubt that they were probably reading it themselves in secret. A great many popular jokes in China have to do with scholars reading novels privately and publicly pretending never to have heard of them. At any rate, scholars wrote treatises to prove that *Hung Lou Meng* was not a novel but a political allegory depicting the decline of China under the foreign rule of the Manchus, the word Red in the title signifying Manchu, and Ling Tai Yü, the young girl who dies, although she was the one destined to marry Pao Yü, signifying China, and Pao Ts'ai, her successful rival, who secures the jade in her place, standing for the foreigner, and so forth. The very name Chia signified, they said, falseness. But this was a farfetched explanation of what was written as a novel and stands as a novel and as

such a powerful delineation, in the characteristic Chinese mixture of realism and romance, of a proud and powerful family in decline. Crowded with men and women of the several generations accustomed to living under one roof in China, it stands alone as an intimate description of that life.

In so emphasizing these three novels, I have merely done what the Chinese themselves do. When you say «novel», the average Chinese replies, « Shui Hu, San Kuo, Hung Lou Meng.» Yet this is not to say that there are not hundreds of other novels, for there are. I must mention *Hsi Yü Chi*, or *Record of Travels in the West*, almost as popular as these three. I might mention *Feng Shen Chuan*, the story of a deified warrior, the author unknown but said to be a writer in the time of Ming. I must mention *Ru Ling Wai Shi*, a satire upon the evils of the Tsing dynasty, particularly of the scholars, full of a double-edged though not malicious dialogue, rich with incident, pathetic and humorous. The fun here is made of the scholars who can do nothing practical, who are lost in the world of useful everyday things, who are so bound by convention that nothing original can come from them. The book, though long, has no central character. Each figure is linked to the next by the thread of incident, person and incident passing on together until, as Lu Hsün, the famous modern Chinese writer, has said, «they are like scraps of brilliant silk and satin sewed together.»

And there is *Yea Shou Pei Yin*, or *An Old Hermit Talks in the Sun*, written by a famous man disappointed in official preferment, Shia of Kiang-yin, and there is that strangest of books, *Ching Hua Yuen*, a fantasy of women, whose ruler was an empress, whose scholars were all women. It is designed to show that the wisdom of women is equal to that of men, although I must acknowledge that the book ends with a war between men and women in which the men are triumphant and the empress is supplanted by an emperor.

But I can mention only a small fraction of the hundreds of novels which delight the common people of China. And if those people knew of what I was speaking to you today, they would after all say «tell of the great three, and let us stand or fall by *Shui Hu Chuan* and *San Kuo* and *Hung Lou Meng*.» In these three novels are the lives which the Chinese people lead and have long led, here are the songs they sing and the things at which they laugh and the things which they love to do. Into these novels they have put the generations of their being and to refresh that being they return to these novels again and again, and out of them they have made new songs and plays and other novels. Some of them have come to be almost as famous as the great originals, as for example *Ching P'ing Mei*, that classic of romantic physical love, taken from a single incident in *Shui Hu Chuan*.

But the important thing for me today is not the listing of novels. The aspect which I wish to stress is that all this profound and indeed sublime development of the imagination of a great democratic people was never in its own time and country called literature. The very name for story was «hsiao shuo », denoting something slight and valueless, and even a novel was only a «ts'ang p'ien hsiao shuo », or a longer something which was still slight and useless. No, the people of China forged their own literature apart from letters. And today this is what lives, to be part of what is to come, and all the formal literature, which was called art, is dead. The plots of these novels are often incomplete, the love interest is often not brought to solution, heroines are often not beautiful and heroes often are not brave. Nor has the story always an end;

sometimes it merely stops, in the way life does, in the middle of it when death is not expected.

In this tradition of the novel have I been born and reared as a writer. My ambition, therefore, has not been trained toward the beauty of letters or the grace of art. It is, I believe, a sound teaching and, as I have said, illuminating for the novels of the West.

For here is the essence of the attitude of Chinese novelists – perhaps the result of the contempt in which they were held by those who considered themselves the priests of art. I put it thus in my own words, for none of them has done so.

The instinct which creates *the arts* is not the same as that which produces art. The creative instinct is, in its final analysis and in its simplest terms, an enormous extra vitality, a super-energy, born inexplicably in an individual, a vitality great beyond all the needs of his own living – an energy which no single life can consume. This energy consumes itself then in creating more life, in the form of music, painting, writing, or whatever is its most natural medium of expression. Nor can the individual keep himself from this process, because only by its full function is he relieved of the burden of this extra and peculiar energy – an energy at once physical and mental, so that all his senses are more alert and more profound than another man's, and all his brain more sensitive and quickened to that which his senses reveal to him in such abundance that actuality overflows into imagination. It is a process proceeding from within. It is the heightened activity of every cell of his being, which sweeps not only himself, but all human life about him, or in him, in his dreams, into the circle of its activity.

From the product of this activity, art is deducted – but not by him. The process which creates is not the process which deduces the shapes of art. The defining of art, therefore, is a secondary and not a primary process. And when one born for the primary process of creation, as the novelist is, concerns himself with the secondary process, his activity becomes meaningless. When he begins to make shapes and styles and techniques and new schools, then he is like a ship stranded upon a reef whose propeller, whirl wildly as it will, cannot drive the ship onward. Not until the ship is in its element again can it regain its course.

And for the novelist the only element is human life as he finds it in himself or outside himself. The sole test of his work is whether or not his energy is producing more of that life. Are his creatures alive? That is the only question. And who can tell him? Who but those living human beings, the people? Those people are not absorbed in what art is or how it is made-are not, indeed, absorbed in anything very lofty, however good it is. No, they are absorbed only in themselves, in their own hungers and despairs and joys and above all, perhaps, in their own dreams. These are the ones who can really judge the work of the novelist, for they judge by that single test of reality. And the standard of the test is not to be made by the device of art, but by the simple comparison of the reality of what they read, to their own reality.

I have been taught, therefore, that though the novelist may see art as cool and perfect shapes, he may only admire them as he admires marble statues standing aloof in a quiet and remote gallery; for his place is not with them. His place is in the street. He is happiest there. The street is noisy and the men and women are not perfect in the technique of their expression as the statues are. They are ugly and imperfect, incomplete even as human beings, and where they come from and where they go cannot be known. But they are people and therefore infinitely to be preferred to those who stand upon the pedestals of art.

And like the Chinese novelist, I have been taught to want to write for these people. If they are reading their magazines by the million, then I want my stories there rather than in magazines read only by a few. For story belongs to the people. They are sounder judges of it than anyone else, for their senses are unspoiled and their emotions are free. No, a novelist must not think of pure literature as his goal. He must not even know this field too well, because people, who are his material, are not there. He is a storyteller in a village tent, and by his stories he entices people into his tent. He need not raise his voice when a scholar passes. But he must beat all his drums when a band of poor pilgrims pass on their way up the mountain in search of gods. To them he must cry, «I, too, tell of gods!» And to farmers he must talk of their land, and to old men he must speak of peace, and to old women he must tell of their children, and to young men and women he must speak of each other. He must be satisfied if the common people hear him gladly. At least, so I have been taught in China.

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Banquet Speech

Pearl Buck's speech at the Nobel Banquet at the
City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1938

It is not possible for me to express all that I feel of appreciation for what has been said and given to me. I accept, for myself, with the conviction of having received far beyond what I have been able to give in my books. I can only hope that the many books which I have yet to write will be in some measure a worthier acknowledgment than I can make tonight. And, indeed, I can accept only in the same spirit in which I think this gift was originally given – that it is a prize not so much for what has been done, as for the future. Whatever I write in the future must, I think, be always benefited and strengthened when I remember this day.

I accept, too, for my country, the United States of America. We are a people still young and we know that we have not yet come to the fullest of our powers. This award, given to an American, strengthens not only one, but the whole body of American writers, who are encouraged and heartened by such

generous recognition. And I should like to say, too, that in my country it is important that this award has been given to a woman. You who have already so recognized your own Selma Lagerlöf, and have long recognized women in other fields, cannot perhaps wholly understand what it means in many countries that it is a woman who stands here at this moment. But I speak not only for writers and for women, but for all Americans, for we all share in this. I should not be truly myself if I did not, in my own wholly unofficial way, speak also of the people of China, whose life has for so many years been my life also, whose life, indeed, must always be a part of my life. The minds of my own country and of China, my foster country, are alike in many ways, but above all, alike in our common love of freedom. And today more than ever, this is true, now when China's whole being is engaged in the greatest of all struggles, the struggle for freedom. I have never admired China more than I do now, when I see her uniting as she has never before, against the enemy who threatens her freedom. With this determination for freedom, which is in so profound a sense the essential quality in her nature, I know that she is *unconquerable*. Freedom – it is today more than ever the most precious human possession. We – Sweden and the United States – we have it still. My country is young – but it greets you with a peculiar fellowship, you whose earth is ancient and free.

Prior to the speech, Bertil Lindblad, Director of the Stockholm Observatory at Saltsjöbaden, made the following remarks:

«Mrs. Pearl Buck, you have in your literary works, which are of the highest artistic quality, advanced the understanding and the appreciation in the Western world of a great and important part of mankind, the people of China. You have taught us by your works to see the individuals in that great mass of people. You have shown us the rise and fall of families, and the land as the foundation upon which families are built. In this you have taught us to see those qualities of thought and feeling which bind us all together as human beings on this earth, and you have given us Westerners something of China's soul. When by the development oftechnical inventions the peoples of the earth are drawn closer to each other, the surface of the earth shrinks, so that East and West are no longer separated by almost insurmountable voids of distance, and when on the other hand, partly as a natural effect of this phenomenon, the differences of national character and ambitions clash to form dangerous discontinuities, it is of the greatest importance that the peoples of the earth learn to understand each other as individuals across distances and frontiers. When works of literature succeed in this respect

they are certainly in a very direct way idealistic in the sense in which this word was meant by Alfred Nobel.»

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The Goddess Abides. – New York : John Day, 1972

Once Upon a Christmas. – New York : John Day, 1972

All Under Heaven. – New York : John Day, 1973

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The Rainbow. – New York : John Day, 1974

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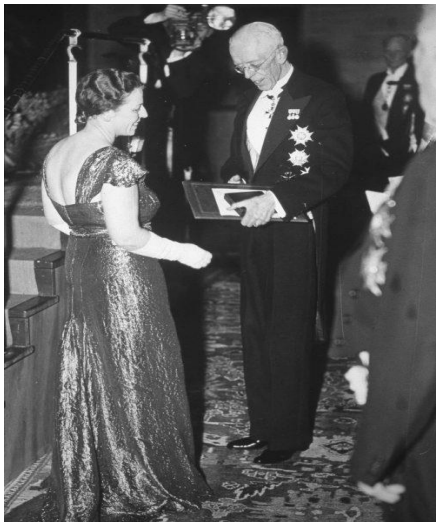
PHOTO GALLERY



Pearl Buck receiving her Nobel Prize from King Gustaf V of Sweden at Konserthuset Stockholm on 10 December 1938.

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At the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony at the Stockholm Concert Hall, 10 December 1938, only two Nobel Laureates were present: Pearl Buck, Literature Laureate, and Enrico Fermi, Physics Laureate.

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Her Books

Pearl S. Buck did not win the Nobel Prize for a single book, but rather for her body of work, which included "The Good Earth" and her biographies of her missionary parents. The Nobel Committee cited her "rich and truly epic descriptions of peasant life in China" in her masterpieces as the reason for awarding her the prize in 1938.

Here's a breakdown:

- **The Good Earth**: This was her best-selling novel about Chinese peasant life in the early 20th century. It was a best-seller in 1931 and 1932, earning her the Pulitzer Prize in 1932.
- **Biographies of her parents**: She also wrote significant biographies of her missionary parents, which contributed to the rationale for her Nobel Prize.
- **Nobel Prize**: In 1938, she became the first American woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature for the overall quality of her descriptive writing, particularly concerning Chinese peasant life.

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Visual Adaptations

Television Credits

- *Omnibus* (1957) as herself [episode "Brewsie and Willie"]
- *Person to Person* (1956) as herself [season 3, episode 29]
- *The Alcoa Hour* (1956) - screenwriter [season 2, episode 2; "The Big Wave"]
- *Robert Montgomery Presents* (1957) - screenwriter [season 8, episode 26; "The Enemy"]

Film credits

- *The Good Earth* (1937)
- *Dragon Seed* (1944)
- *China Sky* (1945)
- *The Big Wave* (1961) - Official film debut; Screenwriter [with Tad Danielewski] and executive producer
- *The Guide* (1965) - Screenwriter
- *China: The Roots of Madness* (1967) as herself

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Awards and Recognition

- Pulitzer Prize for the Novel: *The Good Earth* (1932)
- William Dean Howells Medal (1935)
- Nobel Prize in Literature (1938)
- Child Study Association of America's Children's Book Award (now Bank Street Children's Book Committee's Josette Frank Award): *The Big Wave* (1948)
-

Museums and Historic Houses

Pearl S. Buck's study in Lushan Pearl S. Buck Villa

Several historic sites work to preserve and display artifacts from Pearl's profoundly multicultural life:

- The Pearl S. Buck Summer Villa, in Kuling town, Mount Lu, Jiujiang, China
- Pearl S. Buck House in Nanjing University, China
- The Zhenjiang Pearl S. Buck Research Association and former residence in Zhenjiang, China
- Pearl S. Buck Birthplace in Hillsboro, West Virginia
- Green Hills Farm in Bucks County, Pennsylvania
- The Pearl S. Buck Memorial Hall, Bucheon City, South Korea

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National Women's HALL OF FAME

https://www.womenofthehall.org/inductee/pearl-s-buck/

Pearl S. Buck

Pearl Sydenstricker was the child of American missionaries. She grew up in China and was always "mentally bifocal", as she put it. Becoming a writer at an early age, she married John Buck, an American agricultural expert in China, and bore a daughter. Her family was

caught up in the turmoil of modern China, and in 1927 she narrowly escaped with her life from an angry mob, leaving behind an early manuscript.

Her novel, *The Good Earth* (1931), rocketed her from obscurity to international fame. *The Good Earth* headed the best seller list for months, sold nearly two million copies, and was translated into thirty languages. It inspired a Broadway play and a Hollywood film, and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. In 1938, having published several other novels, she won the Nobel Prize in literature.

Pearl Buck continued to be a remarkably productive writer. A born storyteller, she took plot and character ideas from two different cultures, and her writings shone with universal human appeal. Her over seventy books always sold well. She wrote a book about her father, her mother, and even, courageously, about her daughter's disability. Late in life she turned more to philanthropy, especially to the cause of East-West understanding.

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Pearl S. Buck International

{https://pearlsbuck.org/about/what-we-do/}

Pearl S. Buck International, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization located near Philadelphia in upper Bucks County, PA, carries on Pearl S. Buck's legacy of bridging cultures and changing lives through humanitarian aid, intercultural education, and historical tours of the Pearl S. Buck House, a National Historic Landmark museum.

Pearl S. Buck was a writer, activist, and humanitarian. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Literature for her novel, *The Good Earth*, and the Nobel Prize in Literature for her body of work. Ms. Buck used the spotlight on her to shine a light on the plight of marginalized people everywhere and to advocate for the civil rights movement in the U.S. She also founded Welcome House (the world's first international biracial adoption agency) and established The Pearl S. Buck Foundation (now Pearl S. Buck International) to provide international humanitarian aid.

Ms. Buck's groundbreaking words and work paved the way for greater international and intercultural understanding. They also provided life-changing aid for countless impoverished children. For more information on Pearl Buck's life, please click below.

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U.S. EMBASSY & CONSULATES IN CHINA

{https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/}

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Pearl S. Buck, the American writer who campaigned to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act

Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973) was an American novelist who won the 1932 Pulitzer Prize for her best-selling novel *The Good Earth*. In 1938, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature "for her rich and truly epic descriptions of peasant life in China and for her biographical masterpieces," making her the first American woman to win both the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Buck was born in Hillsborough, West Virginia on June 26, 1892. Five months after her birth, her parents brought her to Zhenjiang in southern China, where they were working as missionaries. Growing up in China and tutored in both English and Chinese, Buch gained a great appreciation for the Chinese language and the Chinese culture. In 1911, Buck left China to attend Randolph Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia.

After graduation in 1914, Buck returned to China. She married agricultural economist John Buck in 1917, and the couple moved to Suzhou, a small river town in the eastern Chinese province of Anhui. The time she spent there inspired her novel *The Good Earth*. In 1920, Buck and her family moved to Nanjing, where she taught English literature in Jinling University, among other universities based in the city. In 1924, the couple returned to the United

States for John Buck's year of sabbatical, during which she earned a Master of Arts degree in English at Cornell University before returning to Nanjing.

After war broke out between Japan and China in 1937, Buck worked hard to provide relief to China's war effort. She formed and headed the China Emergency Relief Committee in 1940 in the United States, which helped send funds to the country for medical supplies, food, and clothing.

During World War II, Buck also led a national campaign to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In 1943, Buck and her husband, among other intellectuals, founded the Citizens Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion to exert pressure on Congress to repeal the Act. In May 1943, she testified before the U.S. House of Representatives to urge lawmakers to overturn the Chinese exclusion laws, making a moral case for repeal as well as arguing that the exclusions are hindering America's wartime alliance with China. Congress subsequently abolished the Chinese Exclusion Act on December 17, 1943.

Growing up during one of China's most tumultuous times, Buck led a legendary life. Some of China's most famous writers in the twentieth century, such as Xu Zhimo, Lin Yutang, and Hu Shih, were close friends with Buck and encouraged her to become a professional writer. She published her first book, *East Wind: West Wind*, in the United States in 1930, and when she returned to Nanjing in 1931, she spent a year working on her famous novel *The Good Earth*.

In 1934, when China was plunged into political turmoil, Buck left for the United States, believing that she could return to China when the situation stabilized. Yet she was never able to revisit the beloved land where she grew up. She died in Danby, Vermont in March 1973, about a year after she was denied an entry visa to join President Nixon's 1972 trip to China.

Buck wrote hundreds of literary works during her lifetime, and for many American readers, her works offer a first glimpse into the life of the Chinese people.

In May 2023, Ambassador Burns paid tribute to Pearl S. Buck by visiting her former residence in Nanjing. The U.S. Embassy Beijing's courtyard is named after her.

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Videos

[01] History Alive "Pearl Buck"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKbcGCyWkyg [28:40]

[02] The Refugees by Pearl S Buck
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3ZMFplQ8u4 [34:20]

[03] The Mother (Version 2) by Pearl S. Buck read by Michele Fry | Full Audio Book
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6Quq1R8s3w [7:45:41]

[04] The Mother by Pearl S. Buck – Audiobook
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JEWln0z5po [7:38:59]

As with Pearl Buck's most famous 1st novel, The Good Earth, this 2nd book also describes peasant life in rural China about 150 years ago--from a woman's close perspective. Life was gruelingly hard. The people were illiterate, superstitious, uneducated, provincial, the culture entirely male dominated. And yet, this book captures the dignity, pleasures, hopes, fears and dreams shared among villagers despite their extreme poverty, and the influence exerted by women over their families. Themes of love, lust, greed, gambling, chauvinism, narcissism, crime, greed, injustice, tyranny, revolution, abortion, etc., are all masterfully woven into the narrative of one unnamed mother's devotion, without a moment of preaching, in this poignantly beautiful masterpiece.

[05] The Mother by Pearl Buck read by Various | Full Audio Book
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpgfnAMn35g [8:00:05]

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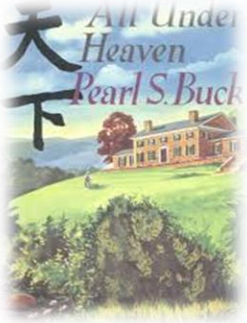

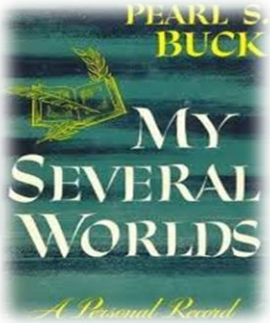

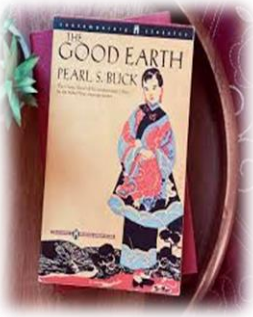

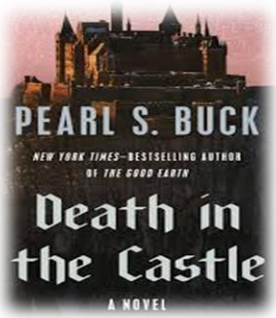

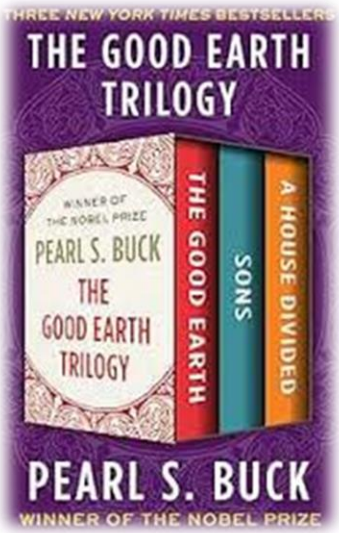

26 Sep 1888

4 Jan 1965

TS Eliot

Nobel Prize in Literature 1948

Born: 26 September 1888, St. Louis, MO, USA
Died: 4 January 1965, London, United Kingdom
Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom
Prize motivation:

"for his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1948/eliot/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1945, by Anders Österling
- Literature 1946, by Anders Österling
- Literature 1946, by Gustaf Hellström
- Literature 1947, by Gustaf Hellström
- Literature 1948, by Donald Stauffer
- Literature 1948, by Oscar Wieselgren
- Literature 1948, by Justin O´ Brien

Submitted nominations for the Nobel Prize in

- Literature 1949, nominee: Riccardo Bacchelli
- Literature 1955, nominee: Saint-John Perse
- Literature 1955, nominee: Eugenio Montale
- Literature 1955, nominee: Giuseppe Ungaretti
- Literature 1958, nominee: Rudolf Alexander Schröder
- Literature 1958, nominee: Saint-John Perse
- Literature 1960, nominee: Saint-John Perse
- Literature 1961, nominee: George Seferis

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Links to Other Sites

01] T.S. Eliot from Pegasos Author's Calendar
02] Selected Poetry of T.S. Eliot from Representative Poetry Online,
03] University of Toronto Libraries

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Anders Österling, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy

In the impressive succession of Nobel Prize winners in Literature, T.S. Eliot marks a departure from the type of writer that has most frequently gained that distinction. The majority have been representatives of a literature which seeks its natural contacts in the public consciousness, and which, to attain this goal, avails itself of the media lying more or less ready at hand. This year's Prize winner has chosen to take another path. His career is remarkable in that, from an extremely exclusive and consciously isolated position, he has gradually come to exercise a very far-reaching influence. At the outset he appeared to address himself to but a small circle of initiates, but this circle slowly widened, without his appearing to will it himself. Thus in Eliot's verse and prose there was quite a special accent, which compelled attention just in our own time, a capacity to cut into the consciousness of our generation with the sharpness of a diamond.

In one of his essays Eliot himself has advanced, as a purely objective and quite uncategorical assumption, that poets in our present civilization have to be difficult to approach. «Our civilization», he says, «comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.»

Against the background of such a pronouncement, we may test his results and learn to understand the importance of his contribution. The effort is worth-while. Eliot first gained his reputation as the result of his magnificent experiment in poetry, *The Waste Land*, which appeared in 1922 and then seemed bewildering in several ways, due to its complicated symbolic language, its mosaic-like technique, and its apparatus of erudite allusion. It may be recalled that this work appeared in the same year as another pioneer work, which had a still more sensational effect on modern literature, the much discussed *Ulysses*, from the hand of an Irishman, James Joyce. The parallel is by no means fortuitous, for these products of the nineteen-twenties are closely akin to one another, in both spirit and mode of composition.
The Waste Land – a title whose terrifying import no one can help feeling, when the difficult and masterly word-pattern has finally yielded up its secrets. The melancholy and sombre rhapsody aims at describing the aridity and impotence of modern civilization, in a series of sometimes realistic and sometimes mythological episodes, whose perspectives impinge on each other with an indescribable total effect. The cycle of poems consists of 436 lines, but actually it contains more than a packed novel of as many pages. *The Waste Land* now lies a quarter of a century back in time, but unfortunately it has proved that its catastrophic visions still have undiminished actuality in the shadow of the atomic age.

Since then Eliot has passed on to a series of poetic creations of the same brilliant concentration, in pursuance of the agonized, salvation-seeking main theme. The *horror vacui* of modern man in a secularized world, without order, meaning, or beauty, here stands out with poignant sincerity. In his latest work, *Four Quartets* (1943), Eliot has arrived at a meditative music of words, with almost liturgical refrains and fine, exact expressions of his spiritual experiences. The transcendental superstructure rises ever clearer in his world picture. At the same time a manifest striving after a positive, guiding message emerges in his dramatic art, especially in the mighty historical play about Thomas of Canterbury, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), but also in *The Family Reunion* (1939), which is a bold attempt to combine such different conceptions as the Christian dogma of original sin and the classical Greek myths of fate, in an entirely modern environment, with the scene laid in a country house in northern England.

The purely poetical part of Eliot's work is not quantitatively great, but as it now stands out against the horizon, it rises from the ocean like a rocky peak and indisputably forms a landmark, sometimes assuming the mystic contours of a cathedral. It is poetry impressed with the stamp of strict responsibility and extraordinary self-discipline, remote from all emotional clichés, concentrated entirely on essential things, stark, granitic, and unadorned, but

from time to time illuminated by a sudden ray from the timeless space of miracles and revelations.

Insight into Eliot must always present certain problems to be overcome, obstacles which are at the same time stimulating. It may appear to be contradictory to say that this radical pioneer of form, the initiator of a whole revolution in style within present-day poetry, is at the same time a coldly reasoning, logically subtle theorist, who never wearies of defending historical perspectives and the necessity of fixed norms for our existence. As early as the 1940's, he had become a convinced supporter of the Anglican Church in religion and of classicism in literature. In view of this philosophy of life, which implies a consistent return to ideals standardized by age, it might seem that his modernistic practice would dash with his traditional theory. But this is hardly the case. Rather, in his capacity as an author, he has uninterruptedly and with varying success worked to bridge this chasm, the existence of which he must be fully and perhaps painfully conscious. His earliest poetry, so convulsively disintegrated, so studiously aggressive in its whole technical form, can finally also be apprehended as a negative expression of a mentality which aims at higher and purer realities and must first free itself of abhorrence and cynicism. In other words, his revolt is that of the Christian poet. It should also be observed in this connection that, on the whole, Eliot is careful not to magnify the power of poetry in relation to that of religion. In one place, where he wishes to point out what poetry can really accomplish for our inner life, he does so with great caution and reserve: «It may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves.»

Thus, if it can be said with some justification that Eliot's philosophical position is based on nothing but tradition, it ought nevertheless to be borne in mind that he constantly points out how generally that word has been misused in today's debates. The word «tradition» itself implies movement, something which cannot be static, something which is constantly handed on and assimilated. In the poetic tradition, too, this living principle prevails. The existing monuments of literature form an idealistic order, but this is slightly modified every time a new work is added to the series. Proportions and values are unceasingly changing. Just as the old directs the new, this in its turn directs the old, and the poet who realizes this must also realize the scope of his difficulties and his responsibility.

Externally, too, the now sixty-year-old Eliot has also returned to Europe, the ancient and storm-tossed, but still venerable, home of cultural traditions. Born an American, he comes from one of the Puritan families who emigrated from England at the end of the seventeenth century. His years of study as a young man at the Sorbonne, at Marburg, and at Oxford, clearly revealed to him that at bottom he felt akin to the historical milieu of the Old World, and since 1927 Mr. Eliot has been a British subject.

It is not possible in this presentation to indicate more than the most immediate fascinating features in the complicated multiplicity of Eliot's

characteristics as a writer. The predominating one is the high, philosophically schooled intelligence, which has succeeded in enlisting in its service both imagination and learning, both sensitivity and the analysis of ideas. His capacity for stimulating a reconsideration of pressing questions within intellectual and aesthetic opinion is also extraordinary, and however much the appraisement may vary, it can never be denied that in his period he has been an eminent poser of questions, with a masterly gift for finding the apt wording, both in the language of poetry and in the defence of ideas in essay form.

Nor is it due only to chance that he has written one of the finest studies of Dante's work and personality. In his bitter moral pathos, in his metaphysical line of thought, and in his burning longing for a world order inspired by religion, a *civitas dei*, Eliot has indeed certain points of contact with the great Florentine poet. It redounds to his honour that, amidst the varied conditions of his milieu, he can be justly characterized as one of Dante's latest-born successors. In his message we hear solemn echoes from other times, but that message does not by any means therefore become less real when it is given to our own time and to us who are now living.
Mr. Eliot – According to the diploma, the award is made chiefly in appreciation of your remarkable achievements as a pioneer within modern poetry. I have here tried to give a brief survey of this very important work of yours, which is admired by many ardent readers in this country.

Exactly twenty-five years ago, there stood where you are now standing another famous poet who wrote in the English tongue, William Butler Yeats. The honour now passes to you as being a leader and a champion of a new period in the long history of the world's poetry.

With the felicitations of the Swedish Academy, I now ask you to receive your Prize from the hands of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince.

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Banquet Speech

Thomas Stearns Eliot's speech at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1948

When I began to think of what I should say to you this evening, I wished only to express very simply my appreciation of the high honour which the Swedish Academy has thought fit to confer upon me. But to do this adequately proved no simple task: my business is with words, yet the words were beyond my command. Merely to indicate that I was aware of having received the highest international honour that can be bestowed upon a man of letters, would be only to say what everyone knows already. To profess my own unworthiness would be to cast doubt upon the wisdom of the Academy; to praise the Academy might suggest that I, as a literary critic, approved the recognition given to myself as a poet. May I therefore ask that it be taken for granted, that I experienced, on learning of this award to myself, all the normal emotions of exaltation and vanity that any human being might be expected to feel at such a moment, with enjoyment of the

flattery, and exasperation at the inconvenience, of being turned overnight into a public figure? Were the Nobel Award similar in kind to any other award, and merely higher in degree, I might still try to find words of appreciation: but since it is different in kind from any other, the expression of one's feelings calls for resources which language cannot supply.

I must therefore try to express myself in an indirect way, by putting before you my own interpretation of the significance of the Nobel Prize in Literature. If this were simply the recognition of merit, or of the fact that an author's reputation has passed the boundaries of his own country and his own language, we could say that hardly any one of us at any time is, more than others, worthy of being so distinguished. But I find in the Nobel Award something more and something different from such recognition. It seems to me more the election of an individual, chosen from time to time from one nation or another, and selected by something like an act of grace, to fill a peculiar role and to become a peculiar symbol. A ceremony takes place, by which a man is suddenly endowed with some function which he did not fill before. So the question is not whether he was worthy to be so singled out, but whether he can perform the function which you have assigned to him: the function of serving as a representative, so far as any man can be of thing of far greater importance than the value of what he himself has written.

Poetry is usually considered the most local of all the arts. Painting, sculpture, architecture, music, can be enjoyed by all who see or hear. But language, especially the language of poetry, is a different matter. Poetry, it might seem, separates peoples instead of uniting them.

But on the other hand we must remember, that while language constitutes a barrier, poetry itself gives us a reason for trying to overcome the barrier. To enjoy poetry belonging to another language, is to enjoy an understanding of the people to whom that language belongs, an understanding we can get in no other way. We may think also of the history of poetry in Europe, and of the great influence that the poetry of one language can exert on another; we must remember the immense debt of every considerable poet to poets of other languages than his own; we may reflect that the poetry of every country and every language would decline and perish, were it not nourished by poetry in foreign tongues. When a poet speaks to his own people, the voices of all the poets of other languages who have influenced him are speaking also. And at the same time he himself is speaking to younger poets of other languages, and these poets will convey something of his vision of life and something of the spirit of his people, to their own. Partly through his influence on other poets, partly through translation, which must be also a kind of recreation of his poems by other poets, partly through readers of his language who are not themselves poets, the poet can contribute toward understanding between peoples.

In the work of every poet there will certainly be much that can only appeal to those who inhabit the same region, or speak the same language, as the poet. But nevertheless there is a meaning to the phrase «the poetry of Europe», and even to the word «poetry» the world over. I think that in poetry people of different countries and different languages – though it be apparently only through a small minority in any one country – acquire an understanding of each other which, however partial, is still essential. And I take the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature, when it is given to a poet, to be primarily an assertion of the supra-national value of poetry. To make that affirmation, it is necessary from time to time to designate a poet: and I stand before you, not on my own merits, but as a symbol, for a time, of the significance of poetry.

Prior to the speech, Gustaf Hellström of the Swedish Academy made these remarks:

«Humility is also the characteristic which you, Mr. Eliot, have come to regard as man's virtue. <The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility.> At first it did not appear that this would be the final result of your visions and your acuity of thought. Born in the Middle West, where the pioneer mentality was still alive, brought up in Boston, the stronghold of Puritan tradition, you came to 9Europe in your youth and were there confronted with the pre-war type of civilization in the Old World: the Europe of Edward VII, Kaiser Wilhelm, the Third Republic, and *The Merry Widow*. This contact was a shock to you, the expression of which you brought to perfection in *The Waste Land*, in which the confusion and vulgarity of the civilization became the object of your scathing criticism. But beneath that criticism there lay profound and painful disillusionment, and out of this disillusionment there grew forth a feeling of sympathy, and out of that sympathy was born a growing urge to rescue from the ruins of the confusion the fragments from which order and stability might be restored. The position you have long held in modern literature provokes a comparison with that occupied by Sigmund Freud, a quarter of a century earlier, within the field of psychic medicine. If a comparison might be permitted, the novelty of the therapy which he introduced with psychoanalysis would match the revolutionary form in which you have clothed your message. But the path of comparison could be followed still further. For Freud the most profound cause of the confusion lay in the *Unbehagen in der Kultur* of modern man. In his opinion there must be sought a collective and individual balance, which should constantly take into account man's primitive instincts. You, Mr. Eliot, are of the opposite opinion. For you the salvation of man lies in the preservation of the cultural tradition, which, in our more mature years, lives with greater vigour within us than does primitiveness, and which we must preserve if chaos is to be avoided. Tradition is not a dead load which we drag along with us, and which in our youthful desire for freedom we seek to throw off. It is the soil in which the seeds of coming harvests are to be sown, and from which future harvests will be garnered. As a poet you have, Mr. Eliot, for decades, exercised a greater influence on your contemporaries and younger fellow writers than perhaps anyone else of our time.»

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Honours and Awards

Below is a partial list of honours and awards received by Eliot or bestowed or created in his honour.

National or State Honours

These honours are displayed in order of precedence based on Eliot's nationality and rules of protocol, not awarding date.

	Order of Merit	United Kingdom	1948[124][125]
	Presidential Medal of Freedom	United States	1964
	Officier de la Légion d'honneur	France	1951
	Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres	France	1960

Literary awards

- Nobel Prize in Literature "for his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry" (1948)
- Hanseatic Goethe Prize (of Hamburg) (1955)
- Dante Medal (of Florence) (1959)

Drama awards

- 1950 Tony Award for Best Play for the Broadway production of *The Cocktail Party*
- 1983 Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical for his poems used in the musical *Cats* (posthumous award)
- 1983 Tony Award for Best Original Score for his poems used in the musical *Cats* (shared with Andrew Lloyd Webber) (posthumous award)

Music awards

- Ivor Novello Award for Best Song Musically and Lyrically for his poems used in the song "Memory" (1982)

Academic awards

- Inducted into Phi Beta Kappa (1935)
- Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1954)
- Elected to the American Philosophical Society (1960)
- Thirteen honorary doctorates (including ones from Oxford, Cambridge, the Sorbonne, and Harvard)

Other honours

- Eliot College of the University of Kent, England, named in his honour
- Celebrated on U.S. commemorative postage stamps
- Star on the St. Louis Walk of Fame

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100 years [1925-2025]

TS Eliot's The Hollow Men

{https://theconversation.com/100-years-on-t-s-eliots-the-hollow-men-is-a-poem-for-our-populist-moment-269487}

In 1927, at 38 years of age, the expatriated American poet T.S. Eliot was baptised and confirmed in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. The celebrated author of The Waste Land (1922) – that literary paragon of abject nihilism – had pivoted away from the liberal, philosophical underpinnings of his upbringing and education, the urbane prejudices of his peers, and the near-blasphemous despondency of his marriage, to become a man of faith.

Eliot's change of heart and mind did not happen overnight, nor without warning. Published 100 years ago, his 1925 poem The Hollow Men provides something of a bridge between the wastelands of 1922 and the spiritual rebirth of 1927.

Alternating between the choral "we" and the more personal "I", The Hollow Men is by turns outward-facing and inward-facing. It is diagnostic and symptomatic, accusatory and culpable, communal and personal. It is a poem about that which ails society at large, and about that which gnaws at the soul of the poet.

The Hollow Men both precipitated and explains Eliot's rather unfashionable turn toward religion in a climate of vehement intellectualism. It is a shift that anybody interested in, say, the rise of religious nationalism or the backlash against elitism in the current moment might just find noteworthy.

Intellectual and spiritual paralysis

The Hollow Men begins with a pair of epigraphs. The first is taken from Joseph Conrad's slender novel, Heart of Darkness: "Mistah Kurtz – he dead." The second makes reference to Guy Fawkes.

The figures of Kurtz and Fawkes – as well as Shakespeare's Brutus, from whose mouth the phrase "hollow men" is directly taken – are keys to understanding many of the impulses and themes driving not only the poem but the mindset that shaped it. Eliot was in a very dark place when he wrote The Hollow Men – in his own words, "the blackest moment in my life". Think of Kurtz up the Congo River, Fawkes stocking the parliamentary cellars with gunpowder, Brutus mulling over his decision to partake in the assassination of Julius Caesar.

The source of his despair was the spiritual paralysis and cultural decay that he had come to associate, through personal experience, with the the intellectualism of the modern era.

Eliot studied at Harvard and Oxford, completing his dissertation on the idealist philosophy of F.H. Bradley in 1916. But he was never awarded his doctorate from Harvard because he did not show up to defend it.

The simple explanation for this was that he was not in North America to do so; he was living in Europe by this stage. Given the direction he was heading, however, a different

explanation might well be put forward: Eliot had lost the strength of his earlier convictions and was in no mood to put on a show of defending what he would ultimately come to view as indefensible. In a letter to his mother from 1929, he wrote:

I am sure that I should have made a very poor professor of Philosophy, because, after my first enthusiasm, I found modern philosophy to be nothing more than a logomachy [an argument about words], believed in by its professors, chiefly because they had to make their living out of it.

Rise of the hallowed men

At a recent event hosted by the conservative think tank, American Compass, the organisation's founder Oren Cass introduced Vice President J.D. Vance with the following comments:

I am thrilled to have this opportunity to talk with you and so grateful that the work you're doing and, in a sense, so in awe of it because there are politicians out there who are – they've just been politicians. But you are someone who was an intellectual first.

Some people don't like the word "intellectual". But I mean it in the good sense of the term. You were writing for National Review. You were at the bar late at night arguing about and helping shape these ideas that you are now …

It was at this point that Vance interrupted Cass and, with an admittedly satirical inflection, said:

I come here for free and you insult me. And you call me an intellectual. Remind me that I wrote for National Review. What an asshole this guy is!
The audience cheered approvingly.

National Review was founded in 1955 by conservative intellectual William F. Buckley and is very much associated with the American right. Vance's performative umbrage was not that of a conservative being reminded about his liberal college days, or even a MAGA loyalist being reminded about his tamer conservative days; it was that of a populist being reminded about his overtly cerebral days.

For the man who converted to Catholicism in 2019, two years before openly embracing the Trumpism he had once derided, the word to feign embarrassment over was "intellectual".

Populism is on the rise, as it was in 1925. Mussolini was ruling over Italy. The Weimar Republic of Germany was faltering and providing opportunity for a strongman figure to sweep in seize control. In Spain, the dictator Primo de Rivera was still in power following the military coup of 1923, despite having originally proclaimed that he would only hold the position for 90 days.

The enigma of populism today, as then, is not that it should appeal to the apolitical masses in times of upheaval (it offers simple solutions to complex problems – what's not to like!), but rather that it should appeal to an engaged political intellect like Vance.

It is drawing too long a bow to characterise Eliot as a populist. Politically, he was critical of all the competing ideologies of his time, including fascism, communism and liberalism. Instead, he would come to advocate a form of government grounded in Christian principles and practices.

Eliot's conversion was not epiphanic – he was still grappling with a tendency toward disbelief in his 1930 poem Ash Wednesday. But he was decidedly less uncertain about the dead end that he perceived in secularism, liberalism and specious intellectualism.

In his 1934 book After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy, Eliot wrote:

The number of people in possession of any criteria for discriminating between good and evil is very small; the number of the half-alive hungry for any form of spiritual experience […] is considerable. My own generation has not served them very well. Never has the printing-press been so busy, and never have such varieties of buncombe and false doctrine come from it.

Sentiments of this variety are shared by leading figures in today's Christian nationalist movement in the US. In a recent appearance on the Making Sense podcast, American theologian and pastor Doug Wilson, who counts United States Secretary of War Pete Hegseth among his flock, defined Christian nationalism as "the conviction that secularism is a failed project".

Wilson sees the growing movement as a response and remedy to the "liberal, secular, democratic heyday" of the 1960s, which led to today's "dregs-level […] basement-level […] low-trust society".

Like more extreme forms of religious fanaticism, the discourse of political populism is rife with incendiary appeal. It is a language of action and empowerment, and it tends to oppose secular liberalism, which it views as weak and corrosive.

One does not need to dig very deep to find historical examples. In The Doctrine of Fascism, Mussolini states: "The right to national independence [arises] from an active, self-conscious, political will expressing itself in action and ready to prove its rights."

Similar passages can be found in Hitler's Mein Kampf: "He who would live must fight. He who does not wish to fight in this world, where permanent struggle is the law of life, has not the right to exist."

Eighty years from the end of World War II, we know what such invocations look like when they are followed to their natural conclusions.

Yet consider these remarks by William Wolfe, a senior official in the first Trump administration, who said as recently as 2023 that the time to take up arms is "getting close":

Even though as Christians we seek peace, when the enemy is pressed upon us, if we fail to heed the call to arms, then we are acting as cowards.

Or remarks made by current US Homeland Security Advisor Stephen Miller at the memorial service of Christian nationalist "martyr" Charlie Kirk in September of this year: "You have no idea the dragon you have awakened."

Populist poetics

This brings us to the opening stanza of The Hollow Men, where Eliot presents aspiring religio-nationalist torchbearers with an effigy of liberal secularism, ready for immolation.

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rat's feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us – if at all – not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

The scene is reminiscent of the "desolate plain lying between Hell's portal and the river Acheron" in Dante's Divine Comedy. When Dante asks his guide why the souls here lament so bitterly, he is told that it is because they were, while on earth, neither spiritually alive nor spiritually dead, neither good nor evil.

As such, they are forbidden from entering Hell proper. They are damned to an eternity of ineffectual fence-sitting, so to speak. Eliot ratifies the assignation elsewhere, when he determines: "So far as we are human […] it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist."

Dante's comedy is commonly thought of as a religious poem, one of the great examples of medieval Christian art, which it undoubtedly is. But it is also, like The Hollow Men, a stridently political poem. Dante, who wrote it in exile from his native Florence, proves that no one holds a grudge quite like a poet. He constructs a metaphysics of revenge that would make a summoner-of-dragons like Stephen Miller blush with embarrassment.

But the Divine Comedy is political in other ways too. The poem is composed in Florentine dialect, Dante's native tongue, as opposed to Latin, the language of serious

literature and scholarship. It is a lyrical middle finger in the face of medieval elitism: a poem for the people in the language of the people.

Eliot offers a similar gesture in The Hollow Men, where he appropriates children's nursery rhymes to suggest that the antidote to existential despair might just as well take the form of puerile disregard as philosophical postulation:

Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.

The rhetorical manner calls to mind a certain president's schoolyard approach to domestic and international diplomacy via Truth Social. There is, however, something dark and serious lurking beneath this childish veneer. The Hollow Men ends with what have been called the four most quoted lines in 20th century poetry:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

Critics have tended to read this passage as dismally prognostic, which I think is misguided. Given that we know the turn Eliot's life would take shortly afterwards, it strikes me as more of a rallying cry. These are the words of someone willing himself to action.

"This is the way the world ends" isn't so much a prophecy as a provocation. It says, this is how worlds end: through dispirited apathy, and if you don't want that to happen, then you'd better pull yourself up by your bootstraps and do something about it. Far better to go out with a bang than a whimper: a painfully prescient sentiment given the war that, in 1925, was still to come.

Plain and simple

The passage in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar from which Eliot takes his title reads:

There are no tricks in plain and simple faith.
But hollow men, like horses hot at hand,
Make gallant show and promise of their mettle.

By comparing the "hollow men" to show horses, who "like deceitful jades, / sink in the trial", Brutus decries those who compensate for a lack of spirit with lofty diction, who disguise their fear of truth with sophistry, and who rely on tricks where "plain and simple faith" sets the gold standard.

There is little doubt that Eliot has a younger version of himself in mind when he deploys the epithet. On this front, The Hollow Men is reactionary and confessional. It reinforces the adage that there is no zeal like the zeal of the convert.

To close a loop and bring us back into the 21st century, this again calls to mind the aforementioned vice-president. In a 2020 essay titled How I Joined the Resistance, Vance charted his own Eliot-like conversion to Catholicism, disavowing his former worldview with accusations of intellectual and emotional arrogance. "Much of my new atheism," he writes of his pre-converted self, "came down to a desire for social acceptance among American elites."

He follows this renunciation with a quote from Saint Augustine, whose excoriation of Roman hedonism is "the best criticism of our modern age" Vance claims to have ever read.

The point here is not merely to draw parallels between historical examples of anti-elitist sentiment and contemporary ones, but to acknowledge the enduring potency of its spiritually-infused language and reactionary disposition – its poetics, if you will.

The Hollow Men disregarded many of the liberal shibboleths of its time. In doing so, it communed with a populist, religio-nationalist mindset that was beginning to establish a foothold. One hundred years on, it is a poem that feels very much of our time.

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The International

TS Eliot Society

{https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/tseliotsociety/}

There We Start From: Tradition and the T. S. Eliot Society

*This essay was written in 2014 by **David E. Chinitz** and published in* T. S. Eliot, France, and the Mind of Europe, *ed. Jayme Stayer (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2015). It is reproduced here—with additional notes and minor edits—by permission of the editor. Sources in the Works Cited list are linked.*

Founded in the 1980s as "a living and continuing memorial" to Eliot, the Society has about 180 members, two thirds of them from North America, the rest from twenty countries from the United Kingdom and continental Europe to Japan and South Korea, with intermediary stops in Eastern Europe, India, and the Middle East.

Though based in the United States, the Eliot Society had an international dimension from its beginning. The Society originated in the determination of a talented and

enthusiastic immigrant, Leslie Konnyu, to have a monument to Eliot erected in the city of the poet's birth. Born Könnyü László in Tomási, Hungary, Konnyu (1914–1992) had fled the Soviet occupation of his homeland and had been living in St. Louis since 1949, drawn to the city both for its immigrant community and because of his partiality for Eliot. Originally a teacher, he made his living in the United States as a cartographer; he was also a published poet and the author of books on Hungarian and Hungarian-American literature. Although he commissioned, at his own expense, a sculpture of Eliot by fellow immigrant Andrew Osze, hoping to persuade his adopted city to accept this tribute to Eliot as a gift, his efforts were repeatedly thwarted by bureaucratic indifference.

In 1983, however, Konnyu's activities yielded unanticipated results when they came to the attention of Jewel Spears Brooker through a short article in the Tampa Tribune. Her interest piqued by the story of his frustrated exertions, Brooker, who taught in the English Department at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, reached out to Konnyu. She discovered that for several years he had been leading a discussion group of local—which, for Konnyu, meant international—friends who met annually in his living room to discuss Eliot's work. After examining her scholarship, Konnyu invited Brooker to join this group (in which membership was then conferred by invitation) and to deliver the 1984 keynote. Following her address, which was given in the public library, a Hungarian pianist of Konnyu's acquaintance entertained the audience with tunes from Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats*, then a brand-new musical, and Konnyu took up a collection to pay Brooker's plane fare.

Joining forces with Konnyu, Brooker energetically built up the St. Louis group into a large and vibrant society, using her own money and contacts to send out notices and personally recruiting Eliot scholars such as Grover Smith and Ronald Schuchard as well as younger academics. Over the next several years she courted major scholars for the annual keynote address (officially the "T. S. Eliot Memorial Lecture") and worked with the St. Louis group to formalize the association. The T. S. Eliot Society was legally incorporated on December 2, 1986. Its beginnings in a collaboration between an aficionado and a scholar established a pattern for the Society that has persisted for three decades.

In 1988 the Society put on a major international program to mark Eliot's centennial. Without grants, and with minimal institutional support, Brooker and Konnyu managed to bring together exhibits, musical and dramatic performances, poetry readings, and presentations by Cleanth Brooks, Michael Yeats, Russell Kirk, A. D. Moody, George Bornstein, and many others. When a star for Eliot was added to the St. Louis Walk of Fame the next year, Konnyu accepted the recognition on the poet's behalf. He died three years later and did not live to see his original dream fulfilled in 2010 with the erection of a bust of Eliot (by another immigrant sculptor, Vlad Zhitomirsky) at the intersection of Euclid and McPherson. The Writers' Corner established there by the Central West End Association commemorates two other denizens of the neighborhood, Tennessee Williams and Kate Chopin, together with Eliot. The T. S. Eliot Society contributed to the Eliot sculpture using monies that had been set aside at its founding and earmarked for just such a use. The Society has in fact maintained Konnyu's tradition by supporting the establishment of public memorials several times, lobbying successfully in 1998 for a historical plaque at 4446 Westminster Place, Eliot's adolescent home in St. Louis, and funding the restoration in 2007 of the northwest window in St. John's Church, Little Gidding.

For its first decade and more, the Eliot Society met annually in St. Louis on the weekend closest to the poet's September 26 birth date. The first break in that pattern came in 1999 with a meeting in Gloucester, Massachusetts, where the young Eliot had passed the summers with his family. This successful visit to the site of *The Dry Salvages* led naturally to an ambitious plan to bring the Society across the Atlantic to tour the scenes of the remaining three Quartets. In June 2004, the annual meeting convened for a week in London, with excursions by bus to Burnt Norton, East Coker, and Little Gidding.

Proximity drew to this London meeting British and continental scholars who had never ventured to the American Midwest. One of these, the French modernist scholar William Marx, joined the Eliot Society again in St. Louis the following year and suggested the idea of a future meeting in Paris, which he generously volunteered to host. This invitation created an irresistible opportunity to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Eliot's formative year in Paris, 1910–11. A July 2011 meeting in La Ville-Lumière eventuated.

As it has since the days of Jewel Brooker's leadership, the Eliot Society takes seriously its mission to encourage scholarship on Eliot. An allied organization of the Modern Language Association, the Society has sponsored panels at the MLA's annual convention on such topics as "Eliot and Transnationalism," "Eliot and Violence," and "Eliot, H.D., and New England." The Society has likewise been active in organizing panels at the American Literature Association's annual conference and at the Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900.

The Society's own annual meeting provides many opportunities for discussion of Eliot's life, work, and thought through panels, peer seminars, lectures, banquets, and performances. Attendance is typically between 50 and 60, although the 2011 meeting in Paris drew over 80 participants. The highlight of the annual meeting is the T. S. Eliot Memorial Lecture, given each year by an eminent academic or poet. Past speakers have included, for example, the scholars Michael Levenson, Marjorie Perloff, Jahan Ramazani, and Helen Vendler; the poets Geoffrey Hill and Carl Phillips; and, in Eliot's own mold, such poet-critics as Robert Crawford and James Longenbach. The Memorial Lecture remains, as Leslie Konyuu first conceived it, free and open to the public.

Time Present, the Society's newsletter (published thrice annually until the move to web-only publication in 2022), included news, book reviews, abstracts of conference papers, an annual bibliography, and other information of interest to Eliot scholars. The newsletter was mailed to the Society's members; back issues are archived, for public and scholarly use, here and in the "resources and projects" section of our website. The website publishes relevant news and information on the Eliot Society and its activities and helps publicize Eliot-related activities taking place around the world—for example, the production of one of Eliot's plays in New York, or the planning of a conference in Edinburgh or Florence.

Perhaps Leslie Konnyu's most lasting bequest to the institution he founded—one that goes back to the early gatherings in his living room—is a pervasive atmosphere of congeniality that endures even now in the Eliot Society's activities. It is probably because of that warmth that many scholars who intended to come once to the annual gathering in St. Louis have found themselves returning regularly for years. Although

this quality suffuses the Society's intellectual proceedings, it shows through especially clearly in such after-hours traditions as the Saturday-night sing-along—at which selections from *Cats* are now strictly forbidden—and late-night cocktail parties. As the original cadre of St. Louisans in Leslie Konnyu's circle diminishes, the Eliot Society is undergoing a period of generational transition. Though its practices will inevitably evolve, one hopes that the hospitable and rather boisterous spirit of its early years will continue to pilot the Society through a future in which it finds itself, as Eliot himself counsels, "still and still moving."

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Videos

01] T.S. Eliot

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUO-ICj6PHQ [49:46]

The early poetry of T.S. Eliot is examined. Differences between Pound and Eliot, in particular the former's interest in translation versus the latter's in quotation, are suggested. Eliot's relationship to tradition is considered in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The early poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is read, with emphasis on the poem's resistance to traditional forms and its complicated depiction of its speaker's fragmentary consciousness.

02] The Other Side of Despair: The Search for Meaning in T.S Eliot's "The Waste Land"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sc5B1Lxdx9I [1:39:09]

Ralston College presents a talk by Christopher Snook, Lecturer in the Department of Classics at Dalhousie University, on T.S. Eliot's modernist masterpiece The Waste Land. The lecture explores the personal, historical, and literary contexts of Eliot's poem. Through an engagement with the Western tradition that is simultaneously rich and fragmented, The Waste Land confronts cultural and personal crises that have atrophied both memory and desire. Snook finds in Eliot's work a mournful modernism that serves as a serious and searching rejoinder to the more frivolous and enervated responses present in some modernist schools, most notably Dadaism. This lecture was delivered on April 15th, 2024 at Ralston College's Savannah campus, during the final term of the second year of the MA in the Humanities Program.

03] TS Eliot documentary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AozoUXTukg0 [17:34]

Thomas Stearns Eliot OM (26 September 1888 – 4 January 1965) was a poet, essayist, publisher, playwright, literary critic and editor. Considered one of the 20th century's major poets, he is a central figure in English-language Modernist poetry.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, to a prominent Boston Brahmin family, he moved to England in 1914 at the age of 25 and went on to settle, work, and marry there. He became a British citizen in 1927 at the age of 39, subsequently renouncing his American citizenship.

Eliot first attracted widespread attention for his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in 1915, which, at the time of its publication, was considered outlandish. It was followed by "The Waste Land" (1922), "The Hollow Men" (1925), "Ash Wednesday" (1930), and Four Quartets (1943). He was also known for seven plays, particularly Murder in the Cathedral (1935) and The Cocktail Party (1949). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948, "for his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry".

04] Complete Theories and Literary Criticism by T.S. Eliot! Detailed Explanation! UGC NET English

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYUiUHganbw [1:51:14]

Dive deep into T.S. Eliot's Theories and Literary Criticism with this detailed classroom lecture! Explore his groundbreaking ideas and their impact on literature.

05] T.S.ELIOT BIOGRAPHY AND WORKS

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1n1f1mcJdI [56:04]

06] A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnTqmpti6So [56:41]

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25 Sep 1897

6 Jul 1962

William Faulkner

Nobel Prize in Literature 1949

Born: 25 September 1897, New Albany, MS, USA
Died: 6 July 1962, Byhalia, MS, USA
Residence at the time of the award: USA
Prize motivation:

"for his powerful and artistically unique contribution to the modern American novel"

Language: English
William Faulkner received his Nobel Prize one year later, in 1950.
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/faulkner/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1950, by Carl Wilhelm Ludvig Bernadotte (Prins Wilhelm)
- Explore a visualisation of the nominations
- Search for nominees and nominators in the nomination archive

Links to other sites

[01] On William Faulkner from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] Homepage of On William Faulkner from PBS
[03] The William Faulkner Collections at University of Virginia Library
[04] Homepage of The William Faulkner Society

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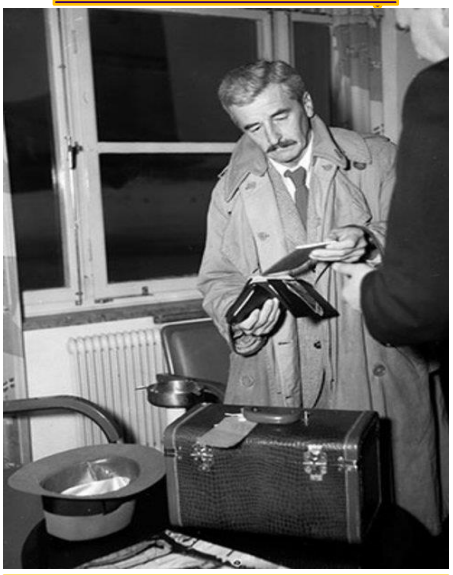
Photo Gallery



William Faulkner arriving in Stockholm for the Nobel Prize award ceremony in Stockholm. Photo taken on 9 December 1950 at the Bromma Airport.

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The Nobel Prize Award Ceremony 1950 [Video]

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/award-video/}

A documentary from the 50th anniversary of the Nobel ceremonies. The Nobel Laureates arrive at the Stockholm Concert Hall on 10 December 1950. First the Royal family enters the hall – Sweden's King Gustaf VI Adolf, Queen Louise, Princess Sibylla, Prince Bertil and Prince Wilhelm – followed by the Nobel Laureates. After Birger Ekeberg delivers his presentation speech each Nobel Prize is awarded: Physics to Cecil Powell; in Chemistry to Otto Diels and Kurt Alder; and in Physiology or Medicine to Edward C. Kendall, Tadeus Reichstein and Philip S. Hench. William Faulkner is awarded the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature, Bertrand Russell the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1950.

A glittering Nobel Banquet in the Stockholm City Hall follows afterwards.

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Gustaf Hellström, Member of the Swedish Academy, December 10, 1950

William Faulkner is essentially a regional writer, and as such reminds Swedish readers now and then of two of our own most important novelists, Selma Lagerlöf and Hjalmar Bergman. Faulkner's Värmland is the northern part of the state of Mississippi and his Vadköping is called Jefferson. The parallelism between him and our two fellow countrymen could be extended and deepened, but time does not allow such excursions now. The difference – the great difference – between him and them is that Faulkner's setting is so much darker and more bloody than that against which Lagerlöf's cavaliers and Bergman's bizarre figures lived. Faulkner is the great epic writer of the southern states with all their background: a glorious past built upon cheap Negro slave labour; a civil war and a defeat which destroyed the economic basis necessary for the then existing social structure; a long drawn-out and painful interim of resentment; and, finally, an industrial and commercial future whose mechanization and standardization of life are strange and hostile to the Southerner and to which he has only gradually been able and willing to adapt himself Faulkner's novels are a continuous and ever-deepening description of this painful process, which he knows intimately and feels intensely, coming as he does from a family which was forced to swallow the bitter fruits of defeat right down to their worm-eaten cores: impoverishment, decay, degeneration in its many varied forms. He has been called a reactionary. But even if this term is to some extent justified, it is balanced by the feeling of guilt which becomes clearer and dearer in the dark fabric at which he labours so untiringly. The price of the gentlemanly environment, the chivalry, the courage, and the often extreme individualism was inhumanity. Briefly, Faulkner's dilemma might be expressed thus: he mourns for and, as a writer, exaggerates a way of life which he himself, with his sense of justice and humanity, would never be able to stomach. It is this that makes his regionalism universal. Four bloody years of war brought about the changes in the social structure which it has taken the peoples of Europe, except the Russians, a century and a half to undergo.

It is against a background of war and violence that the fifty-two-year-old writer sets his more important novels. His grandfather held a high command during the Civil War. He himself grew up in the atmosphere created by warlike feats and by the bitterness and the poverty resulting from the never admitted defeat. When he was twenty he entered the Canadian Royal Air Force, crashed twice, and returned home, not as a military hero but as a physically and psychically war-damaged youth with dubious prospects, who for some years faced a precarious existence. He had joined the war because, as his *alter ego* expressed it in one of his early novels, «one doesn't want to waste a war». But out of the youth who once had been thirsting for sensation and battle, there gradually developed a man whose loathing of violence is expressed more and more passionately and might well be summed up by the Fifth Commandment: Thou shalt not kill. On the other hand, there are things which man must always show himself unwilling to bear: «Some things», says one of his latest characters, «you must always be unable to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. Not for kudos and not for cash – Just refuse to bear them.» 0ne might ask how these two maxims can be reconciled or how Faulkner himself envisages a reconciliation between them in times of international lawlessness. It is a question which he leaves open.

The fact is that, as a writer, Faulkner is no more interested in solving problems than he is tempted to indulge in sociological comments on the sudden changes in the economic position of the southern states. The defeat and the consequences of defeat are merely the soil out of which his epics grow. He is not fascinated by men as a community but by man in the community, the individual as a final unity in himself, curiously unmoved by external conditions. The tragedies of these individuals have nothing in common with Greek tragedy: they are led to their inexorable end by passions caused by inheritance, traditions, and environment, passions which are expressed either in a sudden outburst or in a slow liberation from perhaps generations-old restrictions. With almost every new work Faulkner penetrates deeper into the human psyche, into man's greatness and powers of self-sacrifice, lust for power, cupidity, spiritual poverty, narrow-mindedness, burlesque obstinacy, anguish, terror, and degenerate aberrations. As a probing psychologist he is the unrivalled master among all living British and American novelists. Neither do any of his colleagues possess his fantastic imaginative powers and his ability to create characters. His subhuman and superhuman figures, tragic or comic in a macabre way, emerge from his mind with a reality that few existing people – even those nearest to us – can give us, and they move in a milieu whose odours of subtropical plants, ladies' perfumes, Negro sweat, and the smell of horses and mules penetrate immediately even into a Scandinavian's warm and cosy den. As a painter of landscapes he has the hunter's intimate knowledge of his own hunting-ground, the topographer's accuracy, and the impressionist's sensitivity. Moreover – side by side with Joyce and perhaps even more so – Faulkner is the great experimentalist among twentieth-century novelists. Scarcely two of his novels are similar technically. It seems as if by this continuous renewal he wanted to achieve the increased breadth which his limited world, both in geography and in subject matter, cannot give him. The same desire to experiment is shown in his mastery, unrivalled among modern British and American novelists, of the richness of the English language, a richness derived from its different linguistic elements and the periodic changes in style – from the spirit of the Elizabethans down to the scanty but expressive vocabulary of the Negroes of the southern states. Nor has anyone since Meredith – except perhaps Joyce – succeeded in framing sentences as infinite and powerful as Atlantic rollers. At the same time, few writers of his own age can rival him in giving a chain of events in a series of short sentences, each of which is like a blow of a hammer, driving the nail into the plank up to the head and securing it immovably. His perfect command over the resources of the language can – and often does – lead him to pile up words and associations which try the reader's patience in an exciting or complicated story. But this profusion has nothing to do with literary flamboyance. Nor does it merely bear witness to the abounding agility of his imagination; in all their richness, every new attribute, every new association is intended to dig deeper into the reality which his imaginative power conjures up.

Faulkner has often been described as a determinist. He himself, however, has never claimed to adhere to any special philosophy of life. Briefly, his view of life may perhaps be summed up in his own words: that the whole thing (perhaps?) signifies nothing. If this were not the case, He or They who set up the whole fabric would have arranged things differently. And yet it must mean something, because man continues to struggle and must continue to struggle until, one day, it is all over. But Faulkner has one belief, or rather one hope: that every man sooner or later receives the punishment he deserves and that self-sacrifice not only brings with it personal happiness but also adds to the sum total of the good deeds of mankind. It is a hope, the latter part of which reminds us of the firm conviction expressed by the Swedish poet Viktor Rydberg in the recitative of the Cantata presented at the Jubilee Degree Conferment at Uppsala in 1877.

Mr. Faulkner – The name of the southern state in which you were born and reared has long been well known to us Swedes, thanks to two of the closest and dearest friends of your boyhood, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. Mark Twain put the Mississippi River on the literary map. Fifty years later you began a series of novels with which you created out of the state of Mississippi one of the landmarks of twentieth-century world literature; novels which with their ever-varying form, their ever-deeper and more intense psychological insight, and their monumental characters – both good and evil – occupy a unique place in modern American and British fiction.

Mr. Faulkner – It is now my privilege to ask you to receive from the hands of His Majesty the King the Nobel Prize in Literature, which the Swedish Academy has awarded you.

At the banquet, Robin Fåhraeus, Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, addressed the American author: «Mr. William Faulkner»

We heard with great pleasure that you were coming to our country to receive your Prize in person. We are indeed happy to greet you as an eminent artist, as a detached analyst of the human heart, as a great author who in a brilliant manner has enlarged man's knowledge of himself.

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Banquet Speech

William Faulkner's speech at the Nobel Banquet
at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1950.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel that this award was not made to me as a man, but to my work – a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before. So this award is only mine in trust. It will not be difficult to find a dedication for the money part of it commensurate with the purpose and significance of its origin. But I would like to do the same with the acclaim too, by using this moment as a pinnacle from which I might be listened to by the young men and women already dedicated to the same anguish and travail, among whom is already that one who will some day stand here where I am standing.

Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer

problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed – love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and, worst of all, without pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.

Until he relearns these things, he will write as though he stood among and watched the end of man. I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure: that when the last dingdong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking.

I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.

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Encyclopedia Virginia

{https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/faulkner-william-1897-1962/}

William Faulkner (1897–1962)

SUMMARY

William Faulkner was a Mississippi-born novelist, poet, and screenwriter, winner of the 1949 Nobel Prize in literature, and twice a winner of the Pulitzer Prize in fiction (1955, 1963). Considered one of the most important American writers of the twentieth century, he used primarily southern settings in his work—many of his most famous novels, including *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930), were set in fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi—and examined complex social, psychological, and racial issues. A modernist, he often composed his tragic, even Gothic stories in a dense, stream-of-consciousness style that attempted to emulate the ebb and flow of his characters' thoughts. His characters, meanwhile, ranged from the descendants of slaves to the richest of New South aristocrats, from the illiterate and mentally ill to the Harvard educated. During the last years of his life, Faulkner was a writer-in-residence and a professor at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

[Contributor: C. Alphonso Smith]

William Cuthbert Falkner was born on September 25, 1897, in New Albany, Mississippi, to Murry Cuthbert Falkner, a railroad worker, and Maud Butler, a housewife. William

was raised in Oxford, Mississippi, and, in 1915, left high school to work as a bookkeeper. Longing for adventure, he joined the Canadian Royal Air Force in 1918 by changing the spelling of his name to the British-sounding Faulkner. Faulkner entered the University of Mississippi in 1919 but withdrew in 1920. He then held various jobs in New York and Mississippi until 1924.

Faulkner's first published novel, *Soldier's Pay* (1926), drew on his experiences in World War I (1914–1918), while *Mosquitoes* (1927) examined literary life in New Orleans (in 1925, Faulkner lived there with the writer Sherwood Anderson). Faulkner married Lida Estelle Oldham Franklin on June 20, 1929—she had divorced her husband to marry Faulkner and brought two children of her own to the marriage—and they later had two daughters, Alabama, who died nine days after being born, and Jill.

Faulkner's critical and artistic ascendancy did not begin until the publication of *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929. Citing Faulkner's use of multiple narrators, critics marvelled at the text's loose-limbed experimentalism, in which the author tells his story of the despairing, declining Compson family four separate times but never from the perspective of the character at the novel's center, Caddy. This was Pablo Picasso's Cubism in the form of novel-writing, only instead of Ernest Hemingway's virile hunters or James Joyce's Dubliners, one gets the rotting, rural underbelly of the New South. In *As I Lay Dying* (1930), Faulkner presented the journey of the Bundren family to bury their mother in fifty-nine chapters—one consisting of only a single, confusing sentence: "My mother is a fish"—and in fifteen different voices.

In addition to his work as a novelist, Faulkner earned a living during the 1930s and 1940s by writing movie screenplays based on his own fiction as well as that of other writers, including Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* (1937) and Raymond Chandler's detective story *The Big Sleep* (1939). Faulkner's later work was not all commercially or even critically successful, but he continued to be recognized, winning the Nobel Prize, two Pulitzer Prizes (the second posthumously), and, in 1955, the National Book Award.

Though he lived most of his life at his Rowan Oak house in Oxford, Faulkner was writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia from 1957 until 1958, a position he accepted in part because his daughter and her family were living nearby. Portions of his lectures at the university are recorded in *Faulkner in the University* (1959) and *William Faulkner: Essays, Speeches and Public Letters* (1966). Faulkner bought a house in Charlottesville in 1959 and finished a trilogy he had begun with *The Hamlet* (1940), completing *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959). From 1961 until his death, Faulkner taught American Literature at the University of Virginia. His last novel, *The Reivers* (1962), describes a boy's transition into adulthood.

Faulkner died on July 6, 1962, of a heart attack in Byhalia, Mississippi. He willed the major manuscripts and personal papers in his possession to the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia. In addition, in 1998 and 2000, his daughter, Jill Faulkner Summers, a resident of Charlottesville, donated two portions of his personal library to the University of Virginia collection.

Major Works
Books

- *The Marble Faun* (1924)
- *Soldiers' Pay* (1926)
- *Mosquitoes* (1927)
- *Sartoris* (1929)
- *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)
- *As I Lay Dying* (1930)
- *Sanctuary* (1931)
- *These 13* (1931)
- *Idyll in the Desert* (1931)
- *Miss Zilphia Gant* (1932)
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- *Light in August* (1932)
- *A Green Bough* (1933)
- *Doctor Martino and Other Stories* (1934)
- *Pylon* (1935)
- *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)
- *The Unvanquished* (1938)
- *The Wild Palms* (1939)
- *The Hamlet* (1940)
- *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories* (1942)
- *Intruder in the Dust* (1949)
- *Knight's Gambit* (1951)
- *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (1951)
- *Notes on a Horsethief* (1951)
- *Requiem for a Nun* (1953)
- *Mirrors of Chartres Street* (1953)
- *A Fable* (1955)
- *Big Woods* (1955)
- *Faulkner's County: Tales of Yoknapatawpha County* (1955)
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- *New Orleans Sketches* (edited by Carvel Collins, 1958)
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- *Mississippi Poems* (1979)
- *Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner* (edited by Joseph Blotner, 1979)
- *To Have and Have Not* (screenplay, by Faulkner and Furthman, 1980)
- *The Road to Glory* (screenplay, by Faulkner and Joel Sayre, 1981)
- *Helen: A Courtship* (1981)
- *Faulkner's MGM Screenplays* (edited by Bruce F. Kawin, 1982)
- *Elmer* (edited by Dianne Cox, 1983)
- *A Sorority Pledge* (1983)
- *Father Abraham* (edited by Meriwether, 1983)

- *The DeGaulle Story* (screenplay, edited by Louis Daniel Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin, 1984)
- *Vision in Spring* (edited by Judith Sensibar, 1984)
- *Battle Cry* (screenplay, edited by Brodsky and Hamblin, 1985)
- *William Faulkner Manuscripts* (25 volumes, edited by Blotner, Thomas L. McHaney, Michael Millgate, and Noel Polk, 1986–1987)
- *Country Lawyer and Other Stories for the Screen* (edited by Brodsky and Hamblin, 1987)
- *Stallion Road* (screenplay, edited by Brodsky and Hamblin, 1989).

Collections

- *Three Famous Short Novels* (comprises *Spotted Horses, Old Man,* and *The Bear*, 1942)
- *The Portable Faulkner* (edited by Malcolm Cowley, 1946)
- *The Faulkner Reader* (1954)
- *Snopes: A Trilogy* (3 volumes, comprises *The Hamlet* [revised edition], *The Town,* and *The Mansion*, 1964)

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Filmography

- Flesh (1932)
- Today We Live (1933)
- The Story of Temple Drake (1933)
- Submarine Patrol (1938)
- Air Force (1943)
- To Have and Have Not (1944)
- The Big Sleep (1946)
- Land of the Pharaohs (1955)
- The Tarnished Angels (1957)
- The Reivers (1969)

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THE MISSISSIPPI ENCYCLOPEDIA

https://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/william-faulkner/

William Faulkner

(1897–1962) Author

When Allen Tate described the generation of writers that produced the Southern Renaissance as having a "double focus, a looking two ways," he doubtless was including William Faulkner. That dual perspective—backward to the antebellum South

and the Civil War, forward to the modernist revolution in Western thought and the arts—invested Faulkner's fiction with a perpetual tension, the depth of which was great enough to convert an oeuvre largely confined to a tiny portion of the US South into an expression of national, hemispheric, and world relevance. Born in 1897 in New Albany and moving to Oxford in 1902, Faulkner was the eldest child in a family that had been prominent in the area for three generations, highlighted by his paternal great-grandfather, William C. Falkner, whose extravagant life and career—lawyer, planter, decorated Civil War officer, politician, railroad builder, and novelist—seemed to impose on all his descendants, even the most successful, a sense of inevitable decline.

This family history, combined with a Lost Cause mentality prevalent among southern white males born at the turn of the century, gave Faulkner what Nietzsche called the inclination to "monumentalism." Fortunately for Faulkner's writing, he also acquired the capacity to distance himself from or at least radically complicate his inheritance, largely through his growing familiarity with modernist thought. One source of that familiarity was an Oxford townsman, Phil Stone, who took Faulkner under his superbly educated wing in 1914. For more than a decade Stone conducted a literary tutorial with the young high school dropout, exposing him to everything from the classics to the contemporary, with particular emphasis on nineteenth-century British poetry, the French Symbolists, and the recent poetry and fiction of Wilde, Yeats, Joyce, Pound, and Eliot. Another source was Faulkner's 1925 sojourn in New Orleans's Vieux Carré while waiting to arrange passage to Europe: during those six months, he associated with a number of writers, artists, and journalists, including Sherwood Anderson, William Spratling, Lyle Saxon, Roark Bradford, and Hamilton Basso. Faulkner was an avid listener in a group of notable raconteurs, becoming privy to discussions of current art and literature as well as to the thought and writings of Marx, Nietzsche, Frazer, Bergson, and Freud. He would never again experience an extended participation in a community of intellectual peers.

Following his 1926 return to the United States after a six-month stay in Europe, much of it in Paris, Faulkner spent a good deal of time shuttling among Oxford, New Orleans, and New York. After his 1929 marriage to his former high school sweetheart (the recently divorced Estelle Oldham Franklin), Faulkner settled permanently in Oxford, ready to combine a profound historical sense rooted in the South with the modernist tendency to hold in suspicion virtually all that had been thought and said: the urge, in Pound's terms, to "make it new." Except for several trips to Hollywood as a screenwriter to improve his often precarious financial situation, Faulkner lived and wrote in Oxford. It became part of the model for his fictitious Yoknapatawpha County, which apparently required and justified his decision to remain—in contrast to most modernist American writers—within the narrow arena of his beginnings.

Faulkner's fourth novel, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), was his great breakthrough, as he brought his double focus to major fictional expression. On the one hand, the novel portrays a 1920s southern family whose central voices are obsessed with a past—located in the diverse images of an absent sister—they can neither restore nor convincingly clarify. On the other hand, the novel represents this imprisonment in an irrecoverable past as a narrative revolution: a combination of abrupt scene shifts, looping chronology, and the perversely allusive prose of interior monologue. The backward look may paralyze the Compsons and by extension the impotent upper-class South they represent, but Faulkner asserted his creative vitality with stunning self-assurance.

For his works through *Go Down, Moses* (1942), Faulkner expanded what might seem a narrow and insufficiently representative southern drama into an examination of broader social and cultural conditions. From the sexual rebellion of Caddy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*, which both dismays and fascinates her brother, Quentin, emerged a series of hetero- and homosexual encounters that constitute a kind of initiatory challenge that stimulates in women a passion for experience and in men a fear of contamination. It is as if the double focus of inherited codes and the quest for autonomy assumed a sexual correspondence. Characters such as Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying* (1930), Temple Drake in *Sanctuary* (1931), Lena Grove in *Light in August* (1932), and Charlotte Rittenmeyer in *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (1939) boldly pursue sexual intimacy, while Quentin Compson, in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), the "tall convict" of "Old Man" (1939), and Ike McCaslin of *Go Down, Moses* withdraw from heterosexual engagement, finding comfort in latent homoerotic relations and a protective celibacy restricting any fulfilled sexual intimacy. Complicating this withdrawal is the fact that the power of original imaginative insight, especially in Quentin and Ike, seems to require that restriction.

With *As I Lay Dying* and *The Hamlet* (1940), Faulkner turned to the country people (never "poor whites") of Frenchman's Bend, discovering a community capable of realizing its own version of Jefferson's tensions of past and present, memory and desire, as a productive dynamic. Frenchman's Bend is "hill-cradled and remote, definite yet without boundaries, straddling into two counties and owning allegiance to neither." The dilemma of Frenchman's Bend is that it gives rise to Flem Snopes, who aggrandizes a laissez-faire trading ethic inseparable from the community's own individualistic value system. The result is Faulkner's representation in a small rural town of the power of the twentieth-century US market system and its sometimes crushing effects on people who can no longer reconcile their demands for autonomy and a cohesive and humane social fabric.

Race, however, remained the great social and moral issue of Faulkner's time and place and the driving force of his greatest fiction. In *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Go Down, Moses* the clash of tradition and originality is embodied in Faulkner's effort to deny the validity of racism by empowering the human imagination as the vehicle of truth, the only means of grasping the inhumanity, the destructiveness—for all involved—and the criminal illogic of racist thinking. Both *Light in August* and *Absalom!* make central the "invention" and murder of a black man—Joe Christmas and Charles Bon, respectively—as the key to understanding the history of southern violence and decline. In *Light in August* Faulkner identifies the cultural rather than biological origins of racial difference, portraying Christmas's ultimate autonomy as his refusal to live according to that culture's binary basis. As one unnamed character puts it, "He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad."

In *Absalom* and *Go Down, Moses* it is not so much the social creation of race as the violation of kinship that constitutes the primal sin of southern history. Henry Sutpen's murder of his "black brother," Charles Bon, Carothers McCaslin's incestuous intimacy with his own slave daughter—these unforgivable transgressions are revealed only through the unique imaginative breakthroughs of Quentin Compson, his narrative partner Shreve McCannon, and Ike McCaslin.

With *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner concluded his treatment of southern history and the need to reinterpret it. His later post–World War II fiction focused primarily on contemporary southern life, somewhat diminished in narrative intensity but

nevertheless proposing an inhabitable, possible South, with its Snopes energy of acquisition reduced to a need for "respectability" in *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1957) and its racism reconceived as the possibility of justice for a black man accused of murdering a white man in *Intruder in the Dust* (1948). The greatest exception to a fiction more accommodating to existing conditions is *A Fable* (1954), a World War I novel that is largely remote from Mississippi, in which humanity is destined to perpetual warfare and perpetual hierarchical control, with its only glory lying in the fact that "man and his folly" will endure and prevail. If the imagination retains its power, it does so only in its desperate claim, "I'm not going to die. Never."

Respected yet popularly unacknowledged during the years of his greatest output, Faulkner became widely recognized as the most important twentieth-century American novelist near the end of his career. in 1950 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, and he received the Pulitzer Prize for two novels, *A Fable* (1954) and *The Reivers* (1962). William Faulkner died in Byhalia, Mississippi, 1962.

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AmericanLiterature.Com

{https://americanliterature.com/author/william-faulkner}

William Faulkner (1897 - 1962) is an iconic figure in American literature, particularly in the genre of Southern Gothic literature. Highly influenced by the black nanny who raised him, Callie Barr, and his mother and grandmother's encouragement of his visual imagination, his novels usually explored the politics of sexuality and race. In addition to the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature, he also won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction twice; in 1955 and again in 1963. He was friends with the short story author, Sherwood Anderson, who embraced naturalism and was known as a "writer's writer." He encouraged Faulkner to submit his first book manuscript that got published in 1926, titled *Soldiers' Pay*.

William Cuthbert Falkner (who changed the spelling of his surname in 1918) hailed from Lafayette County in north-central Mississippi and spent most of his life there. Starting in the seventh grade, he studied the history of Mississippi on his own time, rather than complete his school work, had to repeat grades, and never finished high school. Faulkner was surrounded by stories, hearing his elders' account of the Civil War, slavery, the Ku Klux Klan, and his family history, spawning his interest in writing.

In addition to novels, plays, and short stories, Faulkner also wrote essays, poetry and screenplays. His work had a definite regional focus and flavor, conjuring Yoknapatawpha County -- a fictional county based upon Lafayette County -- as the setting for most of his work including; *The*

Sound and the Fury (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), A Rose for Emily (1930), *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). *As I Lay Dying* draws from Homer's *The Odyssey*, Chapter XI: *"As I lay dying, the woman with the dog's eyes would not close my eyes as I descended into Hades."*

Faulkner dated Estelle Oldham in high school and aspired to marry her, believing that he would. Estelle, however, dated other boys and when Cornell Franklin, a young man from a well-placed family proposed, her parents insisted that she accept. When that marriage dissolved in April 1929, Faulkner wasted no time and he and Estelle were married in June of 1929.

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The PEN/Faulkner Foundation

https://www.penfaulkner.org/about-us/

Our History

Championing the Breadth and Power of Fiction

The work of the PEN/Faulkner Foundation began in 1980, when National Book Award-winner Mary Lee Settle set out to create a new prize for fiction in the United States. Judged entirely by writers, free of commercial influence, the award was named for William Faulkner, who had used his Nobel Prize funds to establish a prize for younger artists. In the 45 years since, the PEN/Faulkner Award has become one of the top three national awards for fiction, celebrating a diverse list of authors and recognizing works that represent the highest achievement in the art form, and the PEN/Faulkner Foundation has significantly expanded the scope of its work.

In 1985, PEN/Faulkner established itself as an independent non-profit arts organization and began hosting a series of public fiction readings, bringing writers to DC to share their work. After four decades, those readings have evolved into a wide variety of literary programs that bring authors into conversation with each other and with avid literary audiences both in DC and nationwide.

In 1988, the organization launched a new prize: the PEN/Bermard and Ann Malamud Award for Excellence in the Short Story. The prize is given annually to a writer who demonstrates dedication to the craft of the short story and whose stories are exceptionally well-realized. Over the decades, the PEN/Malamud Award has become one of the nation's most significant literary prizes for the form.

In 1989, PEN/Faulkner launched its first education program, Writers in Schools, sending writers into DC classrooms to visit with students. In the ensuing years, our education programs have grown to provide thousands of students in Title I public and charter schools across the city with free, culturally-relevant books, author visits, and

professional writing instruction, while also supporting more than 100 local writers through paid teaching opportunities. In 2017, we also established Nuestras Voces, an initiative that brings Latino-centric versions of our education programs to the students we work with, allowing us to further serve the educational and literary needs of bilingual students and English Language Learners in DC.

Most recently, in 2020, the organization created a new literary distinctionon the occasion of its 40th anniversary: the PEN/Faulkner Literary Champion. This commendation is presented in recognition of devoted literary advocacy and a commitment to inspiring new generations of readers and writers.

Our Awards [https://www.penfaulkner.org/our-awards/]

Celebrating great literary achievements has lived at the heart of our organization since its founding in 1980, when Mary Lee Settle established the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction: the only major literary award given BY fiction writers TO fiction writers. In more than four decades since, we have expanded our effort to call the world's attention to noteworthy literary artistry and advocacy, adding the PEN/Malamud Award for Excellence in the Short Story and the PEN/Faulkner Literary Champion to our roster of annual recognitions.

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Quotable Quotes

- Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth.
- The past is never dead. It's not even past. All of us labor in webs spun long before we were born, webs of heredity and environment, of desire and consequence, of history and eternity. Haunted by wrong turns and roads not taken, we pursue images perceived as new but whose providence dates to the dim dramas of childhood, which are themselves but ripples of consequence echoing down the generations. The quotidian demands of life distract from this resonance of images and events, but some of us feel it always.

- You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore.
- Don't do what you can do - try what you can't do.
- Unless you're ashamed of yourself now and then, you're not honest.
- Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.
- Don't bother just to be better than others. Try to be better than yourself.
- Life is a process of preparing to be dead for a long time.
- Read, read, read. Read everything -- trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then write. If it's good, you'll find out. If it's not, throw it out of the window.
- All of us failed to match our dreams of perfection. So I rate us on the base of our splendid failure to do the impossible.
- Gratitude is a quality similar to electricity: it must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all.
- If we Americans are to survive it will have to be because we choose and elect and defend to be first of all Americans; to present to the world one homogeneous and unbroken front, whether of white Americans or black ones or purple or blue or green... If we in America have reached that point in our desperate culture when we must murder children, no matter for what reason or what color, we don't deserve to survive, and probably won't.
- Given the choice between the experience of pain and nothing, I would choose pain.
- Be scared. You can't help that. But don't be afraid.

- Our most treasured family heirloom are our sweet family memories. The past is never dead, it is not even past.
- Sometimes I think it aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us tells him that-a-way.
- He had a word, too. Love, he called it. But I had been used to words for a long time. I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack.
- The next time you try to seduce anyone, don't do it with talk, with words. Women know more about words than men ever will. And they know how little they can ever possibly mean.
- Clocks slay time... time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life.

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Videos

[01] Tomorrow ft. Robert Duval (Based on William Faulkner's writ)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vh2hRX6dGmI [1:42:43]

[02] The Wild Palms - William Faulkner - NBC University Theater
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0BRmj7_xkQ [1:02:15]

[03] Tomorrow (1972) W. Faulkner, Robert Duvall
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qx4I5pIek14 [1:42:18]

[04] The Sound and the Fury | James Franco's Faulkner Novel Adaptation | Full Movie
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EOHn_70AHo [1:42:12]

[05] Carl Rollyson, "The Life of William Faulkner"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xt0TUqG-z0 [59:50]

[06] William Faulkner: A Life on Paper (1979)

https://www.pbs.org/video/william-faulkner-a-life-on-paper-1979-fa2oiz/

[1:54:16]

A feature-length documentary chronicling William Faulkner's life and the creation of his fictional Yoknapatawpha County. As the literary world became enthralled with The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, Faulkner wrestled with many demons of his own. Through interviews with his family and contemporaries, a portrait is painted of the Nobel Prize winning author. Originally released in 1979.

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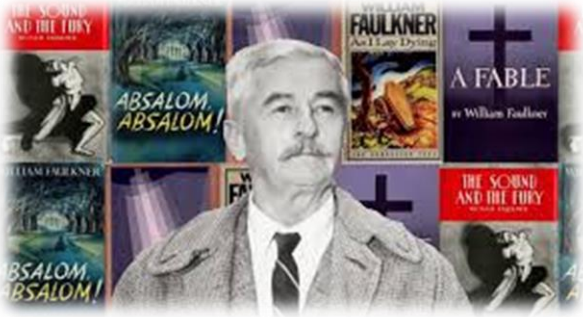
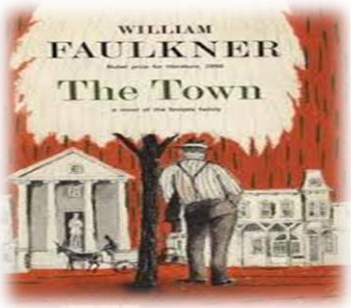
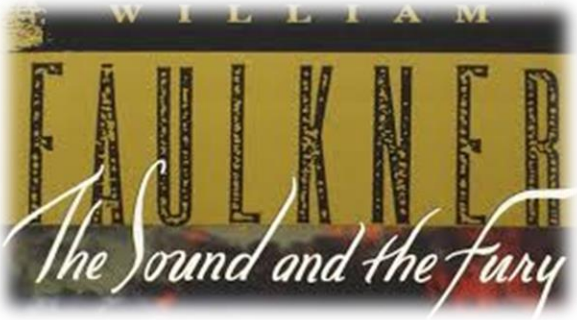
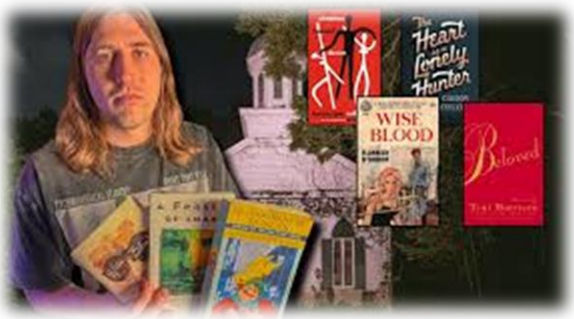
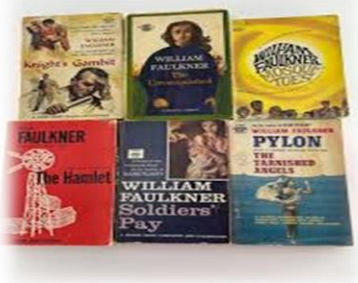


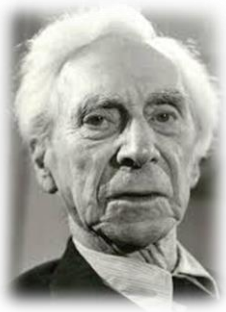








18 May 1872



2 Feb 1970

Bertrand Russell

Nobel Prize in Literature 1950

Born: 18 May 1872, Trelleck, United Kingdom
Died: 2 February 1970, Penrhyndeudraeth, United Kingdom
Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom
Prize motivation:

"in recognition of his varied and
significant writings in which he champions
humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1950/russell/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize in

- Literature 1950, by Eugen Tigerstedt
- Peace 1963, by Michael Foot
- Peace 1963, by Herbert Hart
- Peace 1963, by Stephen Shingier
- Peace 1963, by Joyce Butler
- Peace 1963, by 4 members of the House of Common
- Peace 1963, by John Mackie
- Peace 1963, by John Herman Randall
- Peace 1963, by Remigiusz Bierzanek
- Peace 1963, by A Ayer
- Peace 1963, by J Forus
- Peace 1963, by Haward Parsons

- Peace 1963, by Aldo Capitini
- Peace 1963, by André Haurion
- Peace 1963, by John Sommerville
- Peace 1963, by Maurice Natanson
- Peace 1963, by Frederik Jacobus Johannes Buytendijk
- Peace 1963, by Andrea Vasa
- Peace 1963, by Ossip Flechtheim
- Peace 1963, by Thomas Clement Douglas
- Peace 1963, by Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker
- Peace 1963, by Herbert Feigl
- Peace 1963, by Mario delle Piano
- Peace 1963, by Raphael Mahler
- Peace 1963, by Theodoro Brameld
- Peace 1963, by Several Italian senators
- Peace 1963, by Franz Paul Schneider
- Peace 1963, by Wolfgang Abendroth
- Peace 1963, by Filmer Northrop
- Peace 1963, by Milton Hunnex
- Peace 1963, by David Martin
- Peace 1963, by J Presser
- Peace 1963, by Jørgen Jørgensen
- Peace 1963, by K Bechert
- Peace 1963, by Rubin Gotesky
- Peace 1963, by Jan Jansson
- Peace 1963, by Göran von Bonsdorff
- Peace 1963, by Arne Naess
- Peace 1963, by C van Peursen
- Peace 1963, by Huston Smith
- Peace 1963, by Douglas Fisher
- Peace 1963, by John Lavely
- Peace 1963, by Georges Vedel
- Peace 1963, by William Neumann
- Peace 1963, by Warren Steinkraus
- Peace 1963, by Charles Morris
- Peace 1967, by I Petrovsky
- Explore a visualisation of the nominations
- Search for nominees and nominators in the nomination archive

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Links to other sites

[01] The Bertrand Russell Archives at McMaster University
[02] Bertrand Arthur William Russell. A Biography at the MacTutor History of Mathematics archive
[03] On Bertrand Russell from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[04] The Bertrand Russell Society

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Photo gallery

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1950/russell/photo-gallery/

Bertrand Russell (left) in conversation with Swedish Prince Wilhelm (right)
at the Grand Hotel in Stockholm on 11 December 1950.

This is a photograph of Bertrand Russell at the Nobel Award dinner.
He is wearing the Order of Merit which he received the previous year.

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Anders Österling, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy

The great work on Western philosophy which Bertrand Russell brought out in 1946, that is, at the age of seventy-four, contains numerous characteristic reflections giving us an idea of how he himself might like us to regard his long and arduous life. In one place, speaking of the pre-Socratic philosophers, he says, «In

studying a philosopher, the right attitude is neither reverence nor contempt, but first a kind of hypothetical sympathy, until it is possible to know what it feels like to believe in his theories, and only then a revival of the critical attitude, which should resemble, as far as possible, the state of mind of a person abandoning opinions which he has hitherto held.»

And in another place in the same work he writes, «It is not good either to forget the questions that philosophy asks, or to persuade ourselves that we have found indubitable answers to them. To teach how to live without certainty, and yet without being paralyzed by hesitation, is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can still do for those who study it.»

With his superior intellect, Russell has, throughout half a century, been at the centre of public debate, watchful and always ready for battle, as active as ever to this very day, having behind him a life of writing of most imposing scope. His works in the sciences concerned with human knowledge and mathematical logic are epoch-making and have been compared to Newton's fundamental results in mechanics. Yet it is not these achievements in special branches of science that the Nobel Prize is primarily meant to recognize. What is important, from our point of view, is that Russell has so extensively addressed his books to a public of laymen, and, in doing so, has been so eminently successful in keeping alive the interest in general philosophy.

His whole life's work is a stimulating defence of the reality of common sense. As a philosopher he pursues the line from the classical English empiricism, from Locke and Hume. His attitude toward the idealistic dogmas is a most independent one and quite frequently one of opposition. The great philosophical systems evolved on the Continent he regards, so to speak, from the chilly, windswept, and distinctive perspective of the English Channel. With his keen and sound good sense, his clear style, and his wit in the midst of seriousness, he has in his work evinced those characteristics which are found among only the elite of authors. Time does not permit even the briefest survey of his works in this area, which are fascinating also from a purely literary point of view. It may suffice to mention such books as the *History of Western Philosophy* (1946), *Human Knowledge* (1948), *Sceptical Essays* (1948), and the sketch «My Mental Development» (in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, 1951); but to these should be added a great number of equally important books on practically all the problems which the present development of society involves.

Russell's views and opinions have been influenced by varied factors and cannot easily be summarized. His famous family typifies the Whig tradition in English politics. His grandfather was the Victorian statesman, John Russell. Familiar from an early age with the ideas of Liberalism, he was soon confronted by the problems of rising socialism and since then he has, as an independent critic, weighed the advantages and disadvantages of this form of society. He has consistently and earnestly warned us of the dangers of the new bureaucracy. He has defended the right of the individual against collectivism, and he views industrial civilization as a growing threat to humanity's chances of simple happiness and joy in living. After

his visit to the Soviet Union in 1920 he strongly and resolutely opposed himself to Communism. On the other hand, during a subsequent journey in China, he was very much attracted by the calm and peaceable frame of mind of China's cultivated classes and recommended it as an example to a West ravaged by wild aggression.

Much in Russell's writings excites protest. Unlike many other philosophers, he regards this as one of the natural and urgent tasks of an author. Of course, his rationalism does not solve all troublesome problems and cannot be used as a panacea, even if the philosopher willingly writes out the prescription. Unfortunately, there are – and obviously always will be – obscure forces which evade intellectual analysis and refuse to submit to control. Thus, even if Russell's work has, from a purely practical point of view, met with but little success in an age which has seen two world wars – even if it may look as if, in the main, his ideas have been bitterly repudiated – we must nevertheless admire the unwavering valour of this rebellious teller of the truth and the sort of dry, fiery strength and gay buoyancy with which he presents his convictions, which are never dictated by opportunism but are often directly unpopular. To read the philosopher Russell often gives very much the same pleasure as to listen to the outspoken hero in a Shaw comedy, when in loud and cheerful tones he throws out his bold retorts and keen arguments.

In conclusion, Russell's philosophy may be said in the best sense to fulfil just those desires and intentions that Alfred Nobel had in mind when he instituted his Prizes. There are quite striking similarities between their outlooks on life. Both of them are at the same time sceptics and utopians, both take a gloomy view of the contemporary world, yet both hold fast to a belief in the possibility of achieving logical standards for human behaviour. The Swedish Academy believes that it acts in the spirit of Nobel's intention when, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Foundation, it wishes to honour Bertrand Russell as one of our time's brilliant spokesmen of rationality and humanity, as a fearless champion of free speech and free thought in the West.

My lord – Exactly two hundred years ago Jean Jacques Rousseau was awarded the prize offered by the Academy of Dijon for his famous answer to the question of «whether the arts and sciences have contributed to improve morals.» Rousseau answered «No», and this answer – which may not have been a very serious one – in any case had most serious consequences. The Academy of Dijon had no revolutionary aims. This is true also of the Swedish Academy, which has now chosen to reward you for your philosophical works just because they are undoubtedly of service to moral civilization and, in addition, most eminently answer to the spirit of Nobel's intentions. We honour you as a brilliant champion of humanity and free thought, and it is a pleasure for us to see you here on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Nobel Foundation. With these words I request you to receive from the hands of His Majesty the King the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1950.

At the banquet, Robin Fåhraeus,
Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, made the following comment:

«Dear Professor Bertrand Russell – We salute you as one of the greatest and most influential thinkers of our age, endowed with just those four characteristics which on another occasion you have regarded to be the criteria of prominent fellow men; namely, vitality, courage, receptivity, and intelligence.»

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The Nobel Prize Award Ceremony 1950

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1950/award-video/}

A documentary from the 50th anniversary of the Nobel ceremonies. The Nobel Laureates arrive at the Stockholm Concert Hall on 10 December 1950. First the Royal family enters the hall – Sweden's King Gustaf VI Adolf, Queen Louise, Princess Sibylla, Prince Bertil and Prince Wilhelm – followed by the Nobel Laureates. After Birger Ekeberg delivers his presentation speech each Nobel Prize is awarded: Physics to Cecil Powell; in Chemistry to Otto Diels and Kurt Alder; and in Physiology or Medicine to Edward C. Kendall, Tadeus Reichstein and Philip S. Hench. William Faulkner is awarded the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature, Bertrand Russell the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1950. A glittering Nobel Banquet in the Stockholm City Hall follows afterwards.

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Nobel Prize Lecture

Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1950

What Desires Are Politically Important?

Your Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have chosen this subject for my lecture tonight because I think that most current discussions of politics and political theory take insufficient account of psychology. Economic facts, population statistics, constitutional organization, and so on, are set forth minutely. There is no difficulty in finding out how many South Koreans and how many North Koreans there were when the Korean War began. If you will look into the right books, you will be able to ascertain what was their average income per

head, and what were the sizes of their respective armies. But if you want to know what sort of person a Korean is, and whether there is any appreciable difference between a North Korean and a South Korean; if you wish to know what they respectively want out of life, what are their discontents, what their hopes and what their fears; in a word, what it is that, as they say, «makes them tick», you will look through the reference books in vain. And so you cannot tell whether the South Koreans are enthusiastic about UNO, or would prefer union with their cousins in the North. Nor can you guess whether they are willing to forgo land reform for the privilege of voting for some politician they have never heard of. It is neglect of such questions by the eminent men who sit in remote capitals, that so frequently causes disappointment. If politics is to become scientific, and if the event is not to be constantly surprising, it is imperative that our political thinking should penetrate more deeply into the springs of human action. What is the influence of hunger upon slogans? How does their effectiveness fluctuate with the number of calories in your diet? If one man offers you democracy and another offers you a bag of grain, at what stage of starvation will you prefer the grain to the vote? Such questions are far too little considered. However, let us, for the present, forget the Koreans, and consider the human race.

All human activity is prompted by desire. There is a wholly fallacious theory advanced by some earnest moralists to the effect that it is possible to resist desire in the interests of duty and moral principle. I say this is fallacious, not because no man ever acts from a sense of duty, but because duty has no hold on him unless he desires to be dutiful. If you wish to know what men will do, you must know not only, or principally, their material circumstances, but rather the whole system of their desires with their relative strengths.

There are some desires which, though very powerful, have not, as a rule, any great political importance. Most men at some period of their lives desire to marry, but as a rule they can satisfy this desire without having to take any political action. There are, of course, exceptions; the rape of the Sabine women is a case in point. And the development of northern Australia is seriously impeded by the fact that the vigorous young men who ought to do the work dislike being wholly deprived of female society. But such cases are unusual, and in general the interest that men and women take in each other has little influence upon politics.

The desires that are politically important may be divided into a primary and a secondary group. In the primary group come the necessities of life: food and shelter and clothing. When these things become very scarce, there is no limit to the efforts that men will make, or to the violence that they will display, in the hope of securing them. It is said by students of the earliest history that, on four separate occasions, drought in Arabia caused the population of that country to overflow into surrounding regions, with immense effects, political, cultural, and religious. The last of these four occasions was the rise of Islam. The gradual spread of Germanic tribes from

southern Russia to England, and thence to San Francisco, had similar motives. Undoubtedly the desire for food has been, and still is, one of the main causes of great political events.

But man differs from other animals in one very important respect, and that is that he has some desires which are, so to speak, infinite, which can never be fully gratified, and which would keep him restless even in Paradise. The boa constrictor, when he has had an adequate meal, goes to sleep, and does not wake until he needs another meal. Human beings, for the most part, are not like this. When the Arabs, who had been used to living sparingly on a few dates, acquired the riches of the Eastern Roman Empire, and dwelt in palaces of almost unbelievable luxury, they did not, on that account, become inactive. Hunger could no longer be a motive, for Greek slaves supplied them with exquisite viands at the slightest nod. But other desires kept them active: four in particular, which we can label acquisitiveness, rivalry, vanity, and love of power.

Acquisitiveness – the wish to possess as much as possible of goods, or the title to goods – is a motive which, I suppose, has its origin in a combination of fear with the desire for necessaries. I once befriended two little girls from Estonia, who had narrowly escaped death from starvation in a famine. They lived in my family, and of course had plenty to eat. But they spent all their leisure visiting neighbouring farms and stealing potatoes, which they hoarded. Rockefeller, who in his infancy had experienced great poverty, spent his adult life in a similar manner. Similarly the Arab chieftains on their silken Byzantine divans could not forget the desert, and hoarded riches far beyond any possible physical need. But whatever may be the psychoanalysis of acquisitiveness, no one can deny that it is one of the great motives – especially among the more powerful, for, as I said before, it is one of the infinite motives. However much you may acquire, you will always wish to acquire more; satiety is a dream which will always elude you.

But acquisitiveness, although it is the mainspring of the capitalist system, is by no means the most powerful of the motives that survive the conquest of hunger. Rivalry is a much stronger motive. Over and over again in Mohammedan history, dynasties have come to grief because the sons of a sultan by different mothers could not agree, and in the resulting civil war universal ruin resulted. The same sort of thing happens in modern Europe. When the British Government very unwisely allowed the Kaiser to be present at a naval review at Spithead, the thought which arose in his mind was not the one which we had intended. What he thought was, «I must have a Navy as good as Grandmamma's». And from this thought have sprung all our subsequent troubles. The world would be a happier place than it is if acquisitiveness were always stronger than rivalry. But in fact, a great many men will cheerfully face impoverishment if they can thereby secure complete ruin for their rivals. Hence the present level of taxation.

Vanity is a motive of immense potency. Anyone who has much to do with children knows how they are constantly performing some antic, and saying «Look at me». «Look at me» is one of the most fundamental desires of the human heart. It can take innumerable forms, from buffoonery to the pursuit of posthumous fame. There was a Renaissance Italian princeling who was asked by the priest on his deathbed if he had anything to repent of. «Yes», he said, «there is one thing. On one occasion I had a visit from the Emperor and the Pope simultaneously. I took them to the top of my tower to see the view, and I neglected the opportunity to throw them both down, which would have given me immortal fame». History does not relate whether the priest gave him absolution. One of the troubles about vanity is that it grows with what it feeds on. The more you are talked about, the more you will wish to be talked about. The condemned murderer who is allowed to see the account of his trial in the press is indignant if he finds a newspaper which has reported it inadequately. And the more he finds about himself in other newspapers, the more indignant he will be with the one whose reports are meagre. Politicians and literary men are in the same case. And the more famous they become, the more difficult the press-cutting agency finds it to satisfy them. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the influence of vanity throughout the range of human life, from the child of three to the potentate at whose frown the world trembles. Mankind have even committed the impiety of attributing similar desires to the Deity, whom they imagine avid for continual praise.

But great as is the influence of the motives we have been considering, there is one which outweighs them all. I mean the love of power. Love of power is closely akin to vanity, but it is not by any means the same thing. What vanity needs for its satisfaction is glory, and it is easy to have glory without power. The people who enjoy the greatest glory in the United States are film stars, but they can be put in their place by the Committee for Un-American Activities, which enjoys no glory whatever. In England, the King has more glory than the Prime Minister, but the Prime Minister has more power than the King. Many people prefer glory to power, but on the whole these people have less effect upon the course of events than those who prefer power to glory. When Blücher, in 1814, saw Napoleon's palaces, he said, «Wasn't he a fool to have all this and to go running after Moscow.» Napoleon, who certainly was not destitute of vanity, preferred power when he had to choose. To Blücher, this choice seemed foolish. Power, like vanity, is insatiable. Nothing short of omnipotence could satisfy it completely. And as it is especially the vice of energetic men, the causal efficacy of love of power is out of all proportion to its frequency. It is, indeed, by far the strongest motive in the lives of important men.

Love of power is greatly increased by the experience of power, and this applies to petty power as well as to that of potentates. In the happy days before 1914, when well-to-do ladies could acquire a host of servants, their pleasure in exercising power over the domestics steadily increased with age. Similarly, in any autocratic regime, the holders of power become increasingly tyrannical with experience of the delights that power can afford. Since power over human beings is shown in making them do what they would rather not do, the man who is actuated by love of power is more apt

to inflict pain than to permit pleasure. If you ask your boss for leave of absence from the office on some legitimate occasion, his love of power will derive more satisfaction from a refusal than from a consent. If you require a building permit, the petty official concerned will obviously get more pleasure from saying «No» than from saying «Yes». It is this sort of thing which makes the love of power such a dangerous motive.

But it has other sides which are more desirable. The pursuit of knowledge is, I think, mainly actuated by love of power. And so are all advances in scientific technique. In politics, also, a reformer may have just as strong a love of power as a despot. It would be a complete mistake to decry love of power altogether as a motive. Whether you will be led by this motive to actions which are useful, or to actions which are pernicious, depends upon the social system, and upon your capacities. If your capacities are theoretical or technical, you will contribute to knowledge or technique, and, as a rule, your activity will be useful. If you are a politician you may be actuated by love of power, but as a rule this motive will join itself on to the desire to see some state of affairs realized which, for some reason, you prefer to the status quo. A great general may, like Alcibiades, be quite indifferent as to which side he fights on, but most generals have preferred to fight for their own country, and have, therefore, had other motives besides love of power. The politician may change sides so frequently as to find himself always in the majority, but most politicians have a preference for one party to the other, and subordinate their love of power to this preference. Love of power as nearly pure as possible is to be seen in various different types of men. One type is the soldier of fortune, of whom Napoleon is the supreme example. Napoleon had, I think, no ideological preference for France over Corsica, but if he had become Emperor of Corsica he would not have been so great a man as he became by pretending to be a Frenchman. Such men, however, are not quite pure examples, since they also derive immense satisfaction from vanity. The purest type is that of the *eminence grise* – the power behind the throne that never appears in public, and merely hugs itself with the secret thought: «How little these puppets know who is pulling the strings.» Baron Holstein, who controlled the foreign policy of the German Empire from 1890 to 1906, illustrates this type to perfection. He lived in a slum; he never appeared in society; he avoided meeting the Emperor, except on one single occasion when the Emperor's importunity could not be resisted; he refused all invitations to Court functions, on the ground that he possessed no court dress. He had acquired secrets which enabled him to blackmail the Chancellor and many of the Kaiser's intimates. He used the power of blackmail, not to acquire wealth, or fame, or any other obvious advantage, but merely to compel the adoption of the foreign policy he preferred. In the East, similar characters were not very uncommon among eunuchs.

I come now to other motives which, though in a sense less fundamental than those we have been considering, are still of considerable importance. The first of these is love of excitement. Human beings show their superiority to the brutes by their capacity for boredom, though I have sometimes thought, in examining the apes at

the zoo, that they, perhaps, have the rudiments of this tiresome emotion. However that may be, experience shows that escape from boredom is one of the really powerful desires of almost all human beings. When white men first effect contact with some unspoilt race of savages, they offer them all kinds of benefits, from the light of the gospel to pumpkin pie. These, however, much as we may regret it, most savages receive with indifference. What they really value among the gifts that we bring to them is intoxicating liquor which enables them, for the first time in their lives, to have the illusion for a few brief moments that it is better to be alive than dead. Red Indians, while they were still unaffected by white men, would smoke their pipes, not calmly as we do, but orgiastically, inhaling so deeply that they sank into a faint. And when excitement by means of nicotine failed, a patriotic orator would stir them up to attack a neighbouring tribe, which would give them all the enjoyment that we (according to our temperament) derive from a horse race or a General Election. The pleasure of gambling consists almost entirely in excitement. Monsieur Huc describes Chinese traders at the Great Wall in winter, gambling until they have lost all their cash, then proceeding to lose all their merchandise, and at last gambling away their clothes and going out naked to die of cold. With civilized men, as with primitive Red Indian tribes, it is, I think, chiefly love of excitement which makes the populace applaud when war breaks out; the emotion is exactly the same as at a football match, although the results are sometimes somewhat more serious.

It is not altogether easy to decide what is the root cause of the love of excitement. I incline to think that our mental make-up is adapted to the stage when men lived by hunting. When a man spent a long day with very primitive weapons in stalking a deer with the hope of dinner, and when, at the end of the day, he dragged the carcass triumphantly to his cave, he sank down in contented weariness, while his wife dressed and cooked the meat. He was sleepy, and his bones ached, and the smell of cooking filled every nook and cranny of his consciousness. At last, after eating, he sank into deep sleep. In such a life there was neither time nor energy for boredom. But when he took to agriculture, and made his wife do all the heavy work in the fields, he had time to reflect upon the vanity of human life, to invent mythologies and systems of philosophy, and to dream of the life hereafter in which he would perpetually hunt the wild boar of Valhalla. Our mental make-up is suited to a life of very severe physical labor. I used, when I was younger, to take my holidays walking. I would cover twenty-five miles a day, and when the evening came I had no need of anything to keep me from boredom, since the delight of sitting amply sufficed. But modern life cannot be conducted on these physically strenuous principles. A great deal of work is sedentary, and most manual work exercises only a few specialized muscles. When crowds assemble in Trafalgar Square to cheer to the echo an announcement that the government has decided to have them killed, they would not do so if they had all walked twenty-five miles that day. This cure for bellicosity is, however, impracticable, and if the human race is to survive – a thing which is, perhaps, undesirable – other means must be found for securing an innocent outlet for the unused physical energy that produces love of excitement. This is a matter which has been too little considered, both by moralists and by social reformers. The social

reformers are of the opinion that they have more serious things to consider. The moralists, on the other hand, are immensely impressed with the seriousness of all the permitted outlets of the love of excitement; the seriousness, however, in their minds, is that of Sin. Dance halls, cinemas, this age of jazz, are all, if we may believe our ears, gateways to Hell, and we should be better employed sitting at home contemplating our sins. I find myself unable to be in entire agreement with the grave men who utter these warnings. The devil has many forms, some designed to deceive the young, some designed to deceive the old and serious. If it is the devil that tempts the young to enjoy themselves, is it not, perhaps, the same personage that persuades the old to condemn their enjoyment? And is not condemnation perhaps merely a form of excitement appropriate to old age? And is it not, perhaps, a drug which – like opium – has to be taken in continually stronger doses to produce the desired effect? Is it not to be feared that, beginning with the wickedness of the cinema, we should be led step by step to condemn the opposite political party, dagoes, wops, Asiatics, and, in short, everybody except the fellow members of our club? And it is from just such condemnations, when widespread, that wars proceed. I have never heard of a war that proceeded from dance halls.

What is serious about excitement is that so many of its forms are destructive. It is destructive in those who cannot resist excess in alcohol or gambling. It is destructive when it takes the form of mob violence. And above all it is destructive when it leads to war. It is so deep a need that it will find harmful outlets of this kind unless innocent outlets are at hand. There are such innocent outlets at present in sport, and in politics so long as it is kept within constitutional bounds. But these are not sufficient, especially as the kind of politics that is most exciting is also the kind that does most harm. Civilized life has grown altogether too tame, and, if it is to be stable, it must provide harmless outlets for the impulses which our remote ancestors satisfied in hunting. In Australia, where people are few and rabbits are many, I watched a whole populace satisfying the primitive impulse in the primitive manner by the skillful slaughter of many thousands of rabbits. But in London or New York some other means must be found to gratify primitive impulse. I think every big town should contain artificial waterfalls that people could descend in very fragile canoes, and they should contain bathing pools full of mechanical sharks. Any person found advocating a preventive war should be condemned to two hours a day with these ingenious monsters. More seriously, pains should be taken to provide constructive outlets for the love of excitement. Nothing in the world is more exciting than a moment of sudden discovery or invention, and many more people are capable of experiencing such moments than is sometimes thought.

Interwoven with many other political motives are two closely related passions to which human beings are regrettably prone: I mean fear and hate. It is normal to hate what we fear, and it happens frequently, though not always, that we fear what we hate. I think it may be taken as the rule among primitive men, that they both fear and hate whatever is unfamiliar. They have their own herd, originally a very small one. And within one herd, all are friends, unless there is some special ground

of enmity. Other herds are potential or actual enemies; a single member of one of them who strays by accident will be killed. An alien herd as a whole will be avoided or fought according to circumstances. It is this primitive mechanism which still controls our instinctive reaction to foreign nations. The completely untravelled person will view all foreigners as the savage regards a member of another herd. But the man who has travelled, or who has studied international politics, will have discovered that, if his herd is to prosper, it must, to some degree, become amalgamated with other herds. If you are English and someone says to you, «The French are your brothers», your first instinctive feeling will be, «Nonsense. They shrug their shoulders, and talk French. And I am even told that they eat frogs.» If he explains to you that we may have to fight the Russians, that, if so, it will be desirable to defend the line of the Rhine, and that, if the line of the Rhine is to be defended, the help of the French is essential, you will begin to see what he means when he says that the French are your brothers. But if some fellow-traveller were to go on to say that the Russians also are your brothers, he would be unable to persuade you, unless he could show that we are in danger from the Martians. We love those who hate our enemies, and if we had no enemies there would be very few people whom we should love.

All this, however, is only true so long as we are concerned solely with attitudes towards other human beings. You might regard the soil as your enemy because it yields reluctantly a niggardly subsistence. You might regard Mother Nature in general as your enemy, and envisage human life as a struggle to get the better of Mother Nature. If men viewed life in this way, cooperation of the whole human race would become easy. And men could easily be brought to view life in this way if schools, newspapers, and politicians devoted themselves to this end. But schools are out to teach patriotism; newspapers are out to stir up excitement; and politicians are out to get re-elected. None of the three, therefore, can do anything towards saving the human race from reciprocal suicide.

There are two ways of coping with fear: one is to diminish the external danger, and the other is to cultivate Stoic endurance. The latter can be reinforced, except where immediate action is necessary, by turning our thoughts away from the cause of fear. The conquest of fear is of very great importance. Fear is in itself degrading; it easily becomes an obsession; it produces hate of that which is feared, and it leads headlong to excesses of cruelty. Nothing has so beneficent an effect on human beings as security. If an international system could be established which would remove the fear of war, the improvement in everyday mentality of everyday people would be enormous and very rapid. Fear, at present, overshadows the world. The atom bomb and the bacterial bomb, wielded by the wicked communist or the wicked capitalist as the case may be, make Washington and the Kremlin tremble, and drive men further along the road toward the abyss. If matters are to improve, the first and essential step is to find a way of diminishing fear. The world at present is obsessed by the conflict of rival ideologies, and one of the apparent causes of conflict is the desire for the victory of our own ideology and the defeat of the

other. I do not think that the fundamental motive here has much to do with ideologies. I think the ideologies are merely a way of grouping people, and that the passions involved are merely those which always arise between rival groups. There are, of course, various reasons for hating communists. First and foremost, we believe that they wish to take away our property. But so do burglars, and although we disapprove of burglars our attitude towards them is very different indeed from our attitude towards communists – chiefly because they do not inspire the same degree of fear. Secondly, we hate the communists because they are irreligious. But the Chinese have been irreligious since the eleventh century, and we only began to hate them when they turned out Chiang Kai-shek. Thirdly, we hate the communists because they do not believe in democracy, but we consider this no reason for hating Franco. Fourthly, we hate them because they do not allow liberty; this we feel so strongly that we have decided to imitate them. It is obvious that none of these is the real ground for our hatred. We hate them because we fear them and they threaten us. If the Russians still adhered to the Greek Orthodox religion, if they had instituted parliamentary government, and if they had a completely free press which daily vituperated us, then – provided they still had armed forces as powerful as they have now – we should still hate them if they gave us ground for thinking them hostile. There is, of course, the *odium theologicum*, and it can be a cause of enmity. But I think that this is an offshoot of herd feeling: the man who has a different theology feels strange, and whatever is strange must be dangerous. Ideologies, in fact, are one of the methods by which herds are created, and the psychology is much the same however the herd may have been generated.

You may have been feeling that I have allowed only for bad motives, or, at best, such as are ethically neutral. I am afraid they are, as a rule, more powerful than more altruistic motives, but I do not deny that altruistic motives exist, and may, on occasion, be effective. The agitation against slavery in England in the early nineteenth century was indubitably altruistic, and was thoroughly effective. Its altruism was proved by the fact that in 1833 British taxpayers paid many millions in compensation to Jamaican landowners for the liberation of their slaves, and also by the fact that at the Congress of Vienna the British Government was prepared to make important concessions with a view to inducing other nations to abandon the slave trade. This is an instance from the past, but present-day America has afforded instances equally remarkable. I will not, however, go into these, as I do not wish to become embarked in current controversies.

I do not think it can be questioned that sympathy is a genuine motive, and that some people at some times are made somewhat uncomfortable by the sufferings of some other people. It is sympathy that has produced the many humanitarian advances of the last hundred years. We are shocked when we hear stories of the ill-treatment of lunatics, and there are now quite a number of asylums in which they are not ill-treated. Prisoners in Western countries are not supposed to be tortured, and when they are, there is an outcry if the facts are discovered. We do not approve of treating orphans as they are treated in *Oliver Twist*. Protestant countries

disapprove of cruelty to animals. In all these ways sympathy has been politically effective. If the fear of war were removed, its effectiveness would become much greater. Perhaps the best hope for the future of mankind is that ways will be found of increasing the scope and intensity of sympathy.

The time has come to sum up our discussion. Politics is concerned with herds rather than with individuals, and the passions which are important in politics are, therefore, those in which the various members of a given herd can feel alike. The broad instinctive mechanism upon which political edifices have to be built is one of cooperation within the herd and hostility towards other herds. The co-operation within the herd is never perfect. There are members who do not conform, who are, in the etymological sense, «egregious», that is to say, outside the flock. These members are those who have fallen below, or risen above, the ordinary level. They are: idiots, criminals, prophets, and discoverers. A wise herd will learn to tolerate the eccentricity of those who rise above the average, and to treat with a minimum of ferocity those who fall below it.

As regards relations to other herds, modern technique has produced a conflict between self-interest and instinct. In old days, when two tribes went to war, one of them exterminated the other, and annexed its territory. From the point of view of the victor, the whole operation was thoroughly satisfactory. The killing was not at all expensive, and the excitement was agreeable. It is not to be wondered at that, in such circumstances, war persisted. Unfortunately, we still have the emotions appropriate to such primitive warfare, while the actual operations of war have changed completely. Killing an enemy in a modern war is a very expensive operation. If you consider how many Germans were killed in the late war, and how much the victors are paying in income tax, you can, by a sum in long division, discover the cost of a dead German, and you will find it considerable. In the East, it is true, the enemies of the Germans have secured the ancient advantages of turning out the defeated population and occupying their lands. The Western victors, however, have secured no such advantages. It is obvious that modern war is not good business from a financial point of view. Although we won both the world wars, we should now be much richer if they had not occurred. If men were actuated by self-interest, which they are not – except in the case of a few saints – the whole human race would cooperate. There would be no more wars, no more armies, no more navies, no more atom bombs. There would not be armies of propagandists employed in poisoning the minds of Nation A against Nation B, and reciprocally of Nation B against Nation A. There would not be armies of officials at frontiers to prevent the entry of foreign books and foreign ideas, however excellent in themselves. There would not be customs barriers to ensure the existence of many small enterprises where one big enterprise would be more economic. All this would happen very quickly if men desired their own happiness as ardently as they desired the misery of their neighbours. But, you will tell me, what is the use of these utopian dreams ? Moralists will see to it that we do not become wholly selfish, and until we do the millennium will be impossible.

I do not wish to seem to end upon a note of cynicism. I do not deny that there are better things than selfishness, and that some people achieve these things. I maintain, however, on the one hand, that there are few occasions upon which large bodies of men, such as politics is concerned with, can rise above selfishness, while, on the other hand, there are a very great many circumstances in which populations will fall below selfishness, if selfishness is interpreted as enlightened self-interest.

And among those occasions on which people fall below self-interest are most of the occasions on which they are convinced that they are acting from idealistic motives. Much that passes as idealism is disguised hatred or disguised love of power. When you see large masses of men swayed by what appear to be noble motives, it is as well to look below the surface and ask yourself what it is that makes these motives effective. It is partly because it is so easy to be taken in by a facade of nobility that a psychological inquiry, such as I have been attempting, is worth making. I would say, in conclusion, that if what I have said is right, the main thing needed to make the world happy is intelligence. And this, after all, is an optimistic conclusion, because intelligence is a thing that can be fostered by known methods of education.

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Videos

[01] Bertrand Russell Face to Face Interview BBC (1959)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BupO0oOAyBw [28:50]

Bertrand Russell (1872 -- 1970) was a British philosopher, logician, mathematician, historian, and social critic. At various points in his life he considered himself a liberal, a socialist, and a pacifist, but he also admitted that he had never been any of these in any profound sense. He was born in Monmouthshire, into one of the most prominent aristocratic families in Britain.

[02] Bertrand Russell on Pragmatism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91aIVYogmio [1:31:55]

Bertrand Russell discusses pragmatism, beginning with William James' work "The Will to Believe", and critiquing some of the pragmatist conceptions of truth and knowledge. The audio recording comes from LibriVox and was read by Landon D. C. Elkind.

[03] The Full Russell-Copleston Debate on God (1948)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMsbD1L5IlQ [56:15]

Bertrand Russell and Frederick Copleston discuss the argument from contingency for the existence of God, religious experience, and the status of morality in this famous radio debate from 1948.

[04] BERTRAND RUSSELL, The Mathematician, The Philosopher, The Skeptic, A Salient Biography.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxoKopuIgAs [57:43]

Imagine a life where one man, armed with the sharpest intellect and a refusal to bow to convention, reshapes not only the foundations of logic but also the very way we think about morality, war, and the universe itself. Bertrand Russell, philosopher, mathematician, and fearless critic of societal norms, lived a life of audacious inquiry and unrelenting pursuit of truth. From his groundbreaking work Principia Mathematica that rewired the logic of mathematics, to his fierce pacifism that landed him in prison during World War I, Russell's journey is a testament to the power of reason and courage in an irrational world.

With a mind that bridged abstract theory and pressing human concerns, Russell fought tirelessly for nuclear disarmament, wrote fiery critiques of religion and war, and challenged the hypocrisy of moral conventions—often at great personal cost. Whether unraveling the mysteries of logic or marching in the streets for peace, Russell's life was a rare fusion of academic rigor and moral conviction. This is the story of a man who dared to question everything, reshaping the world in the process. Bertrand Russell's legacy isn't just history—it's a call to think deeper, act braver, and never stop questioning.

[05] Bertrand Russell - Great Interview with John Chandos – 1961

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpohrKaos2o [1:41:26]

[06] Betrand Russell Life and Philosophy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lDg4rpGwIx0 [1:00:20]

[07] Emotion and Discipline by Bertrand Russell | English with Vennila

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRXFhLGaN24 [1:19:34]

[08] What I Believe by Bertrand Russell, Nobel Prize Winner in Literature, and Famous Philosopher and Mathematician

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40ODXtyIE44 [1:24:53]

This is a very insightful series of responses by Bertrand Russell, perhaps the most famous philosopher-thinker of the 20th century, about his beliefs.

[09] Bertrand Russell: Why I Am Not a Christian

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCPYQFYGULc [38:36]

Bertrand Russell, one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, is best known for his critique of religion and his unwavering dedication to reason and humanism. But did you know that Buddhism held a unique place in his philosophical journey? In this video, we explore Russell's views on religion, focusing on his admiration for Buddhist philosophy and ethics. From his critiques of Christian doctrines to his recognition of Buddhism's non-dogmatic approach to suffering and morality, Russell's reflections offer a fascinating perspective on how Eastern and Western philosophies intersect. Discover how Russell's late-life confessions reveal a complex relationship with religion—both as a skeptic and as someone deeply moved by the moral teachings of figures like the Buddha and Jesus Christ.

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Awards and Honours for Bertrand Russell

- **Nobel Prize in Literature (1950):** Awarded for his varied and significant writings that champion humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought.
- **Order of Merit (1949):** An honor awarded for his lifelong contributions to society.
- **Kalinga Prize (1957):** An international award from UNESCO for the popularization of science.
- **Jerusalem Prize (1963):** Given for his lifelong dedication to promoting humane and free ideals in society.
- **Sylvester Medal (1934):** An award from the Royal Society, recognizing his contributions to mathematics.
- **De Morgan Medal (1932):** Awarded by the London Mathematical Society for his work in mathematics.
- **Fellowship of the Royal Society (1908):** An academic honor recognizing his significant scientific and intellectual achievements.
- **Fellowship of Trinity College (1944):** An honour from Cambridge University

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Chronology

1872 Bertrand Russell is born 18 May at Ravenscroft, Wales, to John and Kate, Lord and Lady Amberley. John Stuart Mill is his secular godfather.

1874 His mother and sister die from diphtheria in June and July, respectively.

1876 In January his father dies of bronchitis. He and his brother, Frank, begin living with their paternal grandparents.

1878 Lord John Russell, the former prime minister and Russell's paternal grandfather, dies, and his grandmother, Lady Francis Russell, takes charge of his upbringing.

1890 Russell enters Trinity College, Cambridge University, and begins studies in applied mathematics and mathematical physics (e.g., calculus, optics, astronomy, statics, hydrostatics, dynamics). In February, he is elected to the Apostles, an intellectual secret society at Cambridge.

1893 Upon coming of age in May, Russell inherits £20,000. In July, he begins a year of philosophical studies focusing on ethics, metaphysics, and 17th-century philosophy.

1894 Graduating from Cambridge in June, he chooses a fellowship thesis topic on the philosophy of non-Euclidian geometry. He marries Alys Pearsall Smith in December.

1895 Russell attends economics lectures at the University of Berlin from January to March, receives a five-year fellowship from Trinity College in October, and subsequently studies German social democracy while researching his thesis on geometry.

1896 In January, Russell publishes "The Logic of Geometry" and in March studies Georg Cantor's set theory. In October, he visits the United States. In December, he publishes *German Social Democracy*.

1897 In January, Russell publishes a review of Louis Couturat's book on Cantorian set theory, *De l'Infini Mathématique* (1896). In May, he reads Hermann Lotze's *Metaphysik* (1879) and publishes his fellowship thesis as *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*. In "Seems Madam? Nay, It Is," a talk given in December to the Apostles, he begins to break with idealism.

1898 Russell's grandmother dies in January. In January and February, he attends John McTaggart's lectures on Lotze. Throughout the year, Russell has frequent discussions with G. E. Moore, leading to their adoption of realism and break with idealism. In September, Russell reads Alexius Meinong's *Über die Bedeutung des Weberschen Gesetzes* (1896). He subsequently travels to Italy, Germany, and France, visiting Couturat in November.

1899 Beginning in January, Russell lectures on G. W. Leibniz at Trinity College. In April, he publishes his review of Meinong's *Über die Bedeutung* and responds to Henri Poincaré's review of his *Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*. In July, he again studies Cantorian set theory.

1900 At Couturat's invitation, Russell gives a talk in August at the International Congress of Philosophy in Paris and attends the Second International Congress of Mathematicians, where he meets Giuseppe Peano and hears him speak. Russell acquires Peano's publications in September and reads them all. He publishes *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* in October. Meanwhile, Russell reads volume 1 of Gottlob Frege's *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* (1893). In December, he discovers what is now called Cantor's paradox of the greatest cardinal, which leads him to give a first formulation of a paradox of sets. Russell remains silent on the matter for over a year, except to Alfred North Whitehead. He completes a draft of *The Principles of Mathematics*.

1901 In June, Russell begins to work with Whitehead on "Finite and Infinite Cardinal Numbers," a paper that anticipates *Principia Mathematica* (1910-1913) by treating

cardinal numbers within the logic of relations. He publishes the important "Logic of Relations" in July and November.

1902 In January, Russell acknowledges that his marriage to Alys is unhappy. In May, he begins reading Alexius Meinong's *Über Annahmen* (1902). In June, his rereading Frege's *Begriffsscrift* (1879) and *Grundgesetze* shows him the significance of these texts. Later that month, he communicates the paradox he had earlier discovered, now called Russell's paradox, to Frege and Peano. He receives Frege's response in a matter of days. Russell informs Couturat of the paradox in September.

1903 In May, Russell's *The Principles of Mathematics* is published; it contains his first attempt to prevent contradictions by means of distinguishing entities into types. From June through December, he works on problems of meaning and denoting.

1904 In April, July, and August, Russell publishes "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions." In July, he publishes "The Axiom of Infinity."

1905 In June, Russell reads "The Nature of Truth" to the Jowett Society. In July, he publishes "The Existential Import of Propositions." In October, he publishes his most famous essay, "On Denoting," followed in November by "On the Relation of Mathematics to Symbolic Logic." By this time, he has drafted "On Some Difficulties in the Theory of Transfinite Numbers and Order Types" and is experimenting with a method of preventing paradoxes that does not involve type-distinctions, inspired by the techniques described in "On Denoting."

1906 In March, "On Some Difficulties in the Theory of Transfinite Numbers and Order Types" is published, followed in September by "Les Paradoxes de la Logique," which is later published as "On Insolubilia." In these articles, Russell continues to experiment with a substitutional method of handling the contradictions.

1907 In May, Russell runs for office on the Women's Suffrage ticket in Wimbledon, a Tory district, creating publicity for the movement but losing. Later, he publishes "On the Nature of Truth," accepts a more complex, or ramified, theory of types, and considers the no-classes theory.

1908 In May, Russell publishes "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types," written a year earlier. He is elected a fellow of the Royal Society. "Determinism and Morality," written in May 1905, is published in October. It is later reprinted as the fourth section of "Elements of Ethics" in Philosophical Essays (1910).

1909 In April, Russell publishes "Pragmatism," an essay reviewing John Dewey, William James, and F. C. S. Schiller. It is reprinted in 1910 in *Philosophical Essays*.

1910 In February and May, Russell publishes the first three sections of "Elements of Ethics." In May, he also publishes "The Theory of Logical Types." He receives a five-year

lectureship at Trinity. *Philosophical Essays* appears in November. In December, with Whitehead, he publishes volume 1 of *Principia Mathematica*. He reviews Spinoza's *Ethics*.

1911 In March, Russell begins an intimate relationship with Ottoline Morrell. In the same month, he publishes "Analytic Realism" and reads "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" to the Aristotelian Society. It is published later in the year. In October, he reads "On the Relations of Universals and Particulars" to the Aristotelian Society and meets Ludwig Wittgenstein, who has come to study with him.

1912 *The Problems of Philosophy* is published in January. In April, volume 2 of *Principia Mathematica* is published, as is "The Philosophy of Bergson." Poincaré dies in July. In October, Russell is working on the paper "What Is Logic?" and in December on the nature of matter.

1913 Volume 3 of *Principia Mathematica* is published in April. In May, Russell begins work on *Theory of Knowledge* but abandons it in June after considering Wittgenstein's objections to it. In July, he publishes "On the Notion of Cause." In September, Russell meets Norbert Wiener and reads his dissertation. In the same month, he arranges for Wittgenstein's dictation of "Notes on Logic."

1914 Between March and May, Russell teaches two classes at Harvard University, one on logic, the other on epistemology. He also gives the Lowell lectures there, which are published in August as *Our Knowledge of the External World*. World War I begins. Russell throws himself into antiwar, pacifist work. In November, he delivers "On Scientific Method in Philosophy" as the Herbert Spencer lecture at Oxford University.

1915 In January, Russell publishes "The Ethics of War." In February, he meets D.H. Lawrence. In May, he receives a renewal of his five-year lectureship at Trinity College. In July, he publishes "The Ultimate Constituents of Matter." In November, he publishes *Justice in War-Time*, rejecting his earlier moral objectivism for moral subjectivism.

1916 In April, Russell begins working for the No-Conscription Fellowship. In June, he is fined £110 for his antiwar speeches and writings. In July, he is dismissed from Trinity College for these antiwar efforts. *Principles of Social Reconstruction* is published in November.

1917 Russell's publications throughout the year mostly concern the war. From October to December, he delivers lectures in London on mathematical logic, which he later publishes as *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (1919).

1918 In January, Cantor dies. From January till March, Russell delivers eight lectures in London on logical atomism; the first two are published in the Monist in October. In February, he is sentenced to six months in Brixton prison for referring in print to American use of police to break strikes. Russell enters prison in May. He begins to reject dualism

for neutral monism, writing much of what is to become *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) as well working on *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*. He leaves prison in September.

1919 In January, April, and July, the remaining lectures on logical atomism are published in *The Monist*. In February, Russell writes "On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean." From May to June, he delivers lectures on the analysis of mind. In November, Albert Einstein's general relativity theory is confirmed by experiment. For a week in December, Russell meets at the Hague with Wittgenstein, recently released as a prisoner of war. This is their first contact since 1914. In the same month, Trinity College awards Russell a new five-year lectureship, to commence in July 1920.

1920 Trinity College grants Russell a one-year leave of absence. From April through June, he travels through Russia, where he meets Emma Goldman and interviews Vladimir Lenin. In September, he leaves for China with Dora Black, arriving in October, the same month his essay "The Meaning of *Meaning*" is published in *Mind*. Russell resigns his Trinity lectureship at the end of October. In November, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* is published.

1921 Still in China in March, Russell falls ill with pneumonia and is reported dead by the Japanese press. *The Analysis of Mind* is published in June. In August, Russell arrives back in England. In September, he divorces Alys and marries Dora, who gives birth to his son John in November. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with an introduction by Russell, is published in German in December.

1922 In July, Russell publishes a review of John Maynard Keynes's *Treatise on Probability*. In August, he publishes the essay "The Theory of Relativity." *The Problem of China* is published in September. In November, Russell runs unsuccessfully as the Labor Party candidate in Chelsea. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is published in English in December.

1923 In March, Russell finishes *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*, written with Dora. "Vagueness" is published in June. *The ABC of Atoms* appears in September. In December, Dora gives birth to Russell's daughter Katharine Jane. Throughout the year, Russell works on appendices and a new introduction to *Principia Mathematica* that incorporate ideas suggested by Frank Ramsey and Wittgenstein.

1924 Russell publishes "Logical Atomism" in January, *Icarus, or the Future of Science* in February, and a number of papers on mathematics and physics throughout the year. In February, he completes the new introduction to *Principia Mathematica*.

1925 In March, volume 1 of the second edition of *Principia Mathematica* is published. *What I Believe* appears in the same month. Gottlob Frege dies in July. *On Education, Especially in Early Childhood* is two-thirds done by August. *The ABC of Relativity* is published in October.

1926 In January, Russell publishes "Perception." *On Education* comes out in February, "Psychology and Politics" comes out in March, "Relativity and Religion" in May, a review of Ogden and Richard's *The Meaning of Meaning* in August, and "Behaviorism and Values" in December.

1927 In April, the pamphlet *Why I Am Not a Christian* is published, followed by *The Analysis of Matter* in July and *An Outline of Philosophy* in November. After *Analysis of Matter*, Russell does not publish another book of academic philosophy until 1940. Russell and Dora open the Beacon Hill School in September. Throughout October and November, Russell lectures in New York to raise money for the school.

1928 From January to March, Russell lectures on the philosophy of physics; he also runs the Beacon Hill School. In February, he publishes "Mr. F. P. Ramsey and Logical Paradoxes." At the same time, Dora is lecturing in the United States to raise money for the school. In September, *Sceptical Essays* is published.

1929 In February, Russell reviews Arthur Eddington's *Nature of the Physical World*. In June, Russell and Moore examine Wittgenstein for the PhD. In September, at the start of a new school year at Beacon Hill, Russell begins a two-month series of lectures in New York to raise money for the school. *Marriage and Morals* is published in October.

1930 Frank Ramsey dies in January at age 26. Russell's essay "Probability and Fact" is published in August. *The Conquest of Happiness* comes out in October. In December, Russell reviews James Jeans's *Mysterious Universe*.

1931 In March, Russell's older brother, Frank, dies, and Russell becomes the third Earl Russell. In July, he begins a weekly syndicated newspaper column for the Hearst newspaper chain. In September, he publishes *The Scientific Outlook*. In October, he reviews Ramsey's *Foundations of Mathematics*. From October through December, he is in New York raising money for the Beacon Hill School.

1932 In January, Russell participates in the BBC broadcast "Has Science Changed Society?" Peano dies in April. SIn September, Russell's book *Education and the Social Order* is published. In December, he and Dora agree to a legal separation.

1933 In April, Russell publishes a review of Eddington's *Expanding Universe*. In July, he begins living with Patricia ("Peter") Spence, his children's former governess at the Beacon Hill School.

1934 In October, Russell publishes *Freedom and Organization 1814-1914* and lectures on "The Revolt Against Reason" to the Fabian Society (reprinted as "The Ancestry of Fascism" in *In Praise of Idleness*).

1935 In July, Russell and Dora divorce, and he leaves the Beacon Hill School. In October, he publishes *In Praise of Idleness*. *Religion and Science* is published the same

month, anticipating the emotivist ethics of A. J. Ayer as well as that of C. L. Stevenson. In November, he reads "The Limits of Empiricism" to the Cambridge University Moral Sciences Club.

1936 Russell and Patricia Spence marry in January. In March, Russell reviews A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic*. In April, he delivers "The Limits of Empiricism" to the Aristotelian Society. In May, he publishes "On Order in Time," in July "The Limits of Empiricism," and in October *Which Way to Peace*?

1937 In February, Russell delivers his maiden speech in the House of Lords. The Amberley Papers: The Letters and Diaries of Bertrand Russell's Parents, edited with Patricia, appears in print in March. Russell's son Conrad is born in April. In September, he publishes a new introduction to the second edition of *The Principles of Mathematics*. In November, he reads "On Verification" to the Aristotelian Society.

1938 Russell reads "Propositional Attitudes" to the Oxford University Philosophical Society in February and "On the Relevance of Psychology to Logic" to the Aristotelian Society in July. "On Verification" is published in July. In September, he begins a one-year appointment at the University of Chicago and publishes *Power: A New Social Analysis*. While in Chicago, Russell engages Rudolf Carnap in extensive discussions about the nature of meaning and knowledge.

1939 In March, Russell receives a three-year appointment to teach at the University of California. On a lecture tour from March through May, he speaks on the imminence of war. In September, Germany invades Poland: for much of Europe, World War II begins.

1940 In February, Russell receives an appointment to the faculty of the City College of New York, to begin in January 1941. He resigns from his position in California. In April, the New York appointment is revoked on morals charges. From October to December, Russell delivers the William James Lectures at Harvard University. In June, he publicly announces his support of the war against Germany. In August, he accepts a five-year lectureship appointment from the Barnes Foundation in Pennsylvania. *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* is published in December.

1941 In January, Russell begins lecturing on the history of Western philosophy at the Barnes Foundation. These lectures form the basis of his *History of Western Philosophy* (1945). Russell speaks on CBS radio with Mark Van Doren about Hegel's *Philosophy of History*.

1942 From January to April, CBS radio broadcasts several talks by Russell with Jacques Barzun, Mark Van Doren, Scott Buchanan, and others on various figures in the history of philosophy. In December, Russell is dismissed by the Barnes Foundation before the end of his contract.

1943 From July through December, Russell works in Bryn Mawr College's library on *History of Western Philosophy*. In November, having successfully sued the Barnes Foundation for breach of contract, he is awarded $20,000 in damages. In October, November, and December, he speaks on "Postulates of Scientific Inference" at Bryn Mawr, Wellesley College, and Princeton University. In December, while living in Princeton, New Jersey, he begins regular discussions with Albert Einstein.

1944 In January, Russell learns that he has been awarded a lectureship at Trinity College. He returns to England in June. In the fall, he begins lectures at Trinity on non-demonstrative inference; he gives these annually through 1949. "My Mental Development" and "Reply to Criticisms" are published in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*.

1945 Russell begins speaking regularly on BBC radio on a wide variety of popular and political subjects. In October, *A History of Western Philosophy* is published in America. His essay "Logical Positivism" is also published in October.

1946 In June, on behalf of the British Council, Russell speaks in Switzerland on "Power." In November, *A History of Western Philosophy* is published in Britain.

1947 In January, Russell reviews the second edition of Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic*. From February to May, Russell delivers a number of talks for the BBC. In September and October, on behalf of the British Council, he speaks in Holland, Belgium, and France on the need for world government. Whitehead dies in December. Russell continues to give regular talks and interviews on BBC radio.

1948 In January, Russell and Fr. Frederick Copleston, SJ, take part in a BBC broadcast debate on the existence of God. In October, Russell publishes *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*. Also in October, while on a lecture tour in Norway, he survives the crash of a small plane into the ocean. Two days later, he continues his lecture tour. In the same month, he speaks in Berlin on behalf of the foreign office. In December, he gives the first of six Reith lectures (commemorating John Reith) on BBC radio.

1949 In January, Russell delivers the second of the Reith lectures on BBC radio; these lectures are published in May as *Authority and the Individual*. In April, Russell decides to separate from Patricia. In May, he publishes *Authority and the Individual*. He is awarded the Order of Merit in June. In September, he is elected a Life Fellow to Trinity College.

1950 Russell publishes the essay "Logical Positivism" in January. *Unpopular Essays* comes out in September, the same month in which Russell resumes a friendship with the American Edith Finch. In November, Russell delivers his Machette lecture at Columbia University. It is later published as *The Impact of Science on Society*. In December, he is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1951 In April, Wittgenstein dies. Russell publishes *The Impact of Science on Society* in May and *New Hopes for a Changing World* in September.

1952 In May, Russell celebrates his 80th birthday. In June, he and Patricia divorce. In July, he publishes *What Is Freedom?*, funded by the Information Research Department (IRD), a clandestine agency of the British government. The IRD later secretly funds the publication of *What Is Democracy?* (1953) as well. Russell marries Edith Finch in December.

1953 In February, Russell publishes "The Cult of Common Usage," a criticism of the school of ordinary language philosophy. He also publishes *Satan in the Suburbs*, a collection of short stories. From September through October, Russell broadcasts several talks on different topics on BBC radio.

1954 In May, Russell publishes *Nightmares of Eminent Persons*, another collection of short stories. In July, he publishes *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*. In August, he reviews Ayer's *Philosophical Essays*. In December, he delivers the influential BBC broadcast "Man's Peril from the Hydrogen Bomb." It is reproduced the next year as "The Russell-Einstein Manifesto."

1955 In January, Russell speaks on John Stuart Mill to the British Academy. His talk is later reprinted as a pamphlet and in *Portraits from Memory*. In April, Einstein dies, having previously written Russell of his willingness to sign a document outlining the dangers of nuclear war. In July, "The Russell-Einstein Manifesto" is published, leading to the first Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs in Pugwash, Nova Scotia, in 1957.

1956 In March and April, Russell protests the conviction and imprisonment of Martin Sobell, an accomplice of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. In August and throughout the year, Russell protests when French, British, and Israeli forces attack Egypt. In September, *Portraits from Memory* is published, followed by *Logic and Knowledge* in October. During this year and every year thereafter, Russell writes extensively on the threat of nuclear war.

1957 In April, Russell publishes "Logic and Ontology." In July, "Mr. Strawson on Referring" is published in reply to Strawson's 1950 essay "On Referring." In October, *Why I Am Not a Christian* appears in Britain. In November, Russell publishes "An Open Letter to Eisenhower and Khrushchev," to which Nikita Khrushchev and John Foster Dulles reply.

1958 In January, Russell reviews Gilbert Ryle's *Concept of Mind*. He founds, presides over, and addresses the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), publishing their first pamphlet in February. In October, G. E. Moore dies; Russell writes an obituary for the *Times*.

1959 In January, Russell publishes *Common Sense and Nuclear War*. *My Philosophical Development* is published in May.

1960 In February, Russell debates Edward Teller on nuclear issues on Edward Murrow's CBS television show. Russell resigns from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and forms the Committee of 100, over which he presides. *Act or Perish*, a leaflet written by Russell, is published by the Committee of 100 late in October.

1961 In September, Russell, who is 89 years old, is sentenced to two months in prison after being charged with incitement to breach of peace for participation in an antinuclear demonstration with other members of the Committee of 100. The sentence is reduced to one week in a prison hospital. In October, *Fact and Fiction* is published.

1962 In August, the Cuban ambassador to Great Britain tells Russell of the Cuban government's concerns about a possible U.S. invasion of Cuba. In October, President John F. Kennedy finds evidence of Soviet missiles in Cuba and begins a blockade of Cuba. Russell sends telegrams to Khrushchev and Kennedy urging conciliation. Khrushchev replies to Russell publicly, agreeing that the crisis should not be further escalated and offering to have a summit meeting with the United States.

1963 In January, Russell resigns as president of the Committee of 100. *Unarmed Victory*, his account of the Cuban Missile Crisis, is published in April. That month, Russell begins protesting American atrocities, including the use of napalm, in Vietnam. He forms the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation in September.

1964 Russell writes "The Duty of a Philosopher in This Age." In August, the Tonkin Resolution authorizes U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Russell continues to write voluminously protesting the war in Vietnam and other Cold War threats to peace and safety.

1965 Russell publishes an addendum to his "Replies to Criticisms" in a new edition of *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*.

1966 Russell forms the International War Crimes Tribunal to investigate American military actions in Vietnam.

1967 In January, *War Crimes in Vietnam* is published. Volume 1 of *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* is published in March.

1968 Volume 2 of *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* is published in April. Russell sells his papers to McMaster University to raise money for the International War Crimes Tribunal.

1969 Volume 3 of *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* is published in May. *Dear Bertrand Russell*, selections of his correspondence with the general public from 1950 to 1968, is published in September.

1970 Russell dies at his home in Penrhyndeudraeth, Wales, on 2 February at the age of 97.

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Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy

{https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/russell/}

Bertrand Russell

Bertrand Arthur William Russell (1872–1970) was a British philosopher, logician, essayist and social critic best known for his work in mathematical logic and analytic philosophy. His most influential contributions include his championing of logicism (the view that mathematics is in some important sense reducible to logic), his refining of Gottlob Frege's predicate calculus (which still forms the basis of most contemporary systems of logic), his theories of definite descriptions, logical atomism and logical types, and his theory of neutral monism (the view that the world consists of just one type of substance which is neither exclusively mental nor exclusively physical).

Together with G.E. Moore, Russell is generally recognized as one of the founders of modern analytic philosophy. His famous paradox, theory of types and work with A.N. Whitehead on *Principia Mathematica* invigorated the study of logic throughout the twentieth century (Schilpp 1944, xiii; Wilczek 2010, 74). In the public mind, he was famous as much for his evangelical atheism as for his contributions to technical philosophy.

Over the course of a long career, Russell also made important contributions to a broad range of other subjects, including ethics, politics, educational theory and religious studies, cheerfully ignoring Hooke's admonition to the Royal Society against "meddling with Divinity, Metaphysics, Moralls, Politicks, Grammar, Rhetorick, or Logick" (Kreisel 1973, 24). Generations of general readers have also benefited from his popular writings on a wide variety of topics in both the humanities and the natural sciences. Like Voltaire, to whom he has been compared (Times of London 1970, 12), he wrote with style and wit and had enormous influence.

After a life marked by controversy – including dismissals from both Trinity College, Cambridge and City College, New York – Russell was awarded the Order of Merit in 1949 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. Noted also for his many spirited anti-nuclear protests and for his campaign against western involvement in the Vietnam War, Russell remained a prominent public figure until his death at the age of 97.

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Russell-Einstein Manifesto

{https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-einstein-russell-manifesto-50-years-on/}

On July 5, 1955, in one of his last acts, Albert Einstein signed a manifesto with the logician and philosopher Bertrand Russell. Their widely publicized statement decried the likely spread of nuclear weapons and called for the great states to renounce war as an acceptable method of resolving disputes. In the wake of the development of the Bomb, they argued, the consequences of war are now unthinkable.

The Einstein-Russell manifesto fueled the non-proliferation movement of the era and encouraged massive demonstrations against nuclear weapons. The current treaties impose modest limitations on testing and proliferation, which mostly cover acquisition, but not all nuclear nations are signatories. Even these few and limited international conventions, which were partly due to the impetus of the cold war anti-nuke movement, are in question as North Korea and Iran are believed to be developing their own nuclear weapons.

Einstein and Russell wrote just after both the United States and the Soviet Union developed the hydrogen bomb, whose explosive force is hundreds of kilotons greater than the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By the end of the cold war the two countries had produced at least 110,000 nuclear weapons. Although many of these are technically no longer armed or targeted, the U.S. and Russia still maintain their stockpiles, as do Britain, France, Israel, China, Pakistan and India. The latter two countries nearly went to war in 2001, the U.S. is examining ways to modernize its nuclear forces for new missions, and some policy analysts have suggested that a U.S. atomic strike on North Korea may be needed to prevent it from continuing its nuclear weapons development program.

The plea for reason by Einstein, Russell, and a number of other distinguished co-signatories was implicitly aimed at the only two nuclear-weapons states of the day, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which in 1955 seemed on the path to war. In the post-9/11 environment the international strategic scene is far more complex than it was 50 years ago. Smaller regional powers feel they need nuclear weapons to safeguard their national security and garner more regional and global influence, and non-state actors have no reason to avoid using a nuclear weapon against the United States should they acquire one.

The Einstein-Russell manifesto arose in the cold war but might have even more relevance in the post-cold war world, where the constraints against nuclear proliferation are in grave danger. At the very least, we should mark the anniversary of the manifesto and its cold, clear warning.

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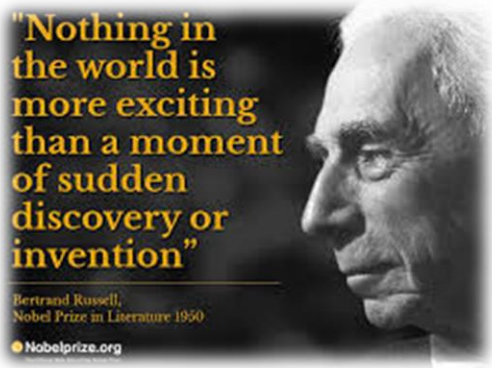
"Nothing in the world is more exciting than a moment of sudden discovery or invention"
Bertrand Russell,
Nobel Prize in Literature 1950
Nobelprize.org

30 Nov 1874

24 Jan 1965

Winston Churchill

Nobel Prize in Literature 1953

Born: 30 November 1874, Woodstock, United Kingdom
Died: 24 January 1965, London, United Kingdom
Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom

Prize motivation:

"for his mastery of historical and
biographical description as well as
for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1953/churchill/facts/

Links to other sites

[01] The Winston Churchill Home Page by the Churchill Center, Washington, D.C.
[02] The Life of Churchill from International Churchill Society
[03] Churchill Archives Centre at Cambridge University, England
[04] The Churchill Era: an educational resource, Cambridge University, England
[05] Winston Churchill at Pegasos Author's Calendar
[[06] On Winston Churchill from BBC History

Documentary

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1953/churchill/documentary/

Sir Winston Churchill, Britain's Prime Minister during the Second World War, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature 1953. The video shows scenes from his working life: Churchill speaking in Manchester, 1938; Churchill and party touring bombed buildings in London, 1940; Churchill in sun helmet in North Africa; Churchill landing in Normandy 1944, greeted by Montgomery; and Churchill walking in the garden, Chartwell, Kent.

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Award Ceremony 1953 : Video

A Summary

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1953/award-video/}

While the rain poured down outside on a gloomy afternoon in Stockholm, 10 December 1953, inside the Stockholm Concert Hall the lights glittered on a festively dressed audience including the Swedish Royal family: King Gustaf VI Adolf, Queen Louise, Princesses Sibylla and Margaretha and Prince Bertil. The Nobel Laureates entered the scene. After Birger Ekeberg delivered his presentation speech, each Nobel Laureate was introduced and the Prize awarded. Professor Erik Hultén introduced the Physics Nobel Laureate, Frits Zernike; the Chemistry Nobel Laureate, Hermann Staudinger, was introduced by Professor Arne Fredga; Professor Einar Hammarsten introduced the Nobel Laureates in Physiology or Medicine, Hans Krebs and Fritz Lipmann; and author Sigfrid Siwertz spoke for the absent Nobel Laureate in Literature, Sir Winston Churchill; Lady Clementine Churchill received the Nobel Prize on behalf of her husband.

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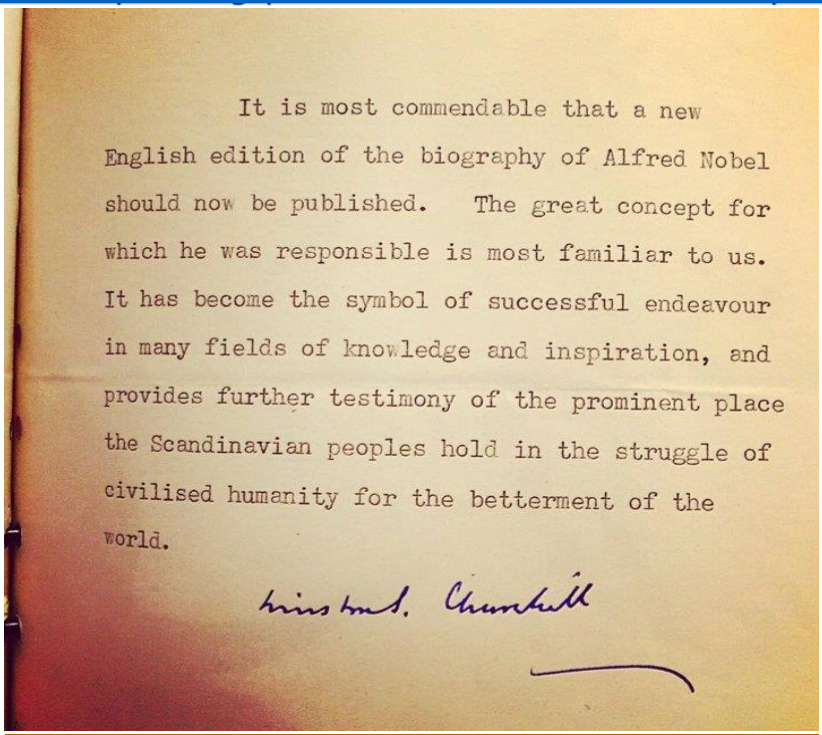
Photo Gallery

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1953/churchill/photo-gallery/



It is most commendable that a new English edition of the biography of Alfred Nobel should now be published. The great concept for which he was responsible is most familiar to us. It has become the symbol of successful endeavour in many fields of knowledge and inspiration, and provides further testimony of the prominent place the Scandinavian peoples hold in the struggle of civilised humanity for the betterment of the world.

Winston S. Churchill

A preface dictated and signed by Winston Churchill, whose secretary typewrote all his books. The preface was for Erik Bergengren's book Alfred Nobel – the man and his work, published in English 1962.
From the archives of the Nobel Foundation, Stockholm, Sweden.

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Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1946, by Axel Romdahl
- Literature 1948, by Harald Hagendahl
- Literature 1948, by Nils Ahnlund
- Literature 1948, by Birger Ekeberg
- Literature 1948, by Einar Löfstedt
- Literature 1948, by Oscar Wieselgren
- Literature 1948, by Birger Nerman
- Literature 1949, by Birger Nerman
- Literature 1949, by Nils Ahnlund
- Literature 1950, by Axel Romdahl
- Literature 1950, by Birger Nerman
- Literature 1950, by Harald Hagendahl
- Literature 1950, by Ture Arne
- Literature 1950, by Heinrich Donner
- Literature 1950, by Wilhelm Keilhau
- Literature 1951, by George Macauley Trevelyan
- Literature 1951, by Birger Nerman
- Literature 1952, by Gustaf Hellström
- Literature 1952, by Birger Nerman
- Literature 1952, by Asta Kihlbom
- Literature 1953, by Birger Nerman
- Peace 1945, by Halvdan Koht
- Peace 1950, by Vinding Kruse

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Submitted nominations for the Nobel Prize in

- Literature 1955, nominee: George Macauley Trevelyan
- Peace 1939, nominee: Edvard Benes

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by S. Siwertz, Member of the Swedish Academy

Very seldom have great statesmen and warriors also been great writers. One thinks of Julius Caesar, Marcus Aurelius, and even Napoleon, whose letters to Josephine during the first Italian campaign certainly have passion and splendour. But the man who can most readily be compared with Sir Winston Churchill is Disraeli, who also was a versatile author. It can be said of Disraeli as Churchill says of Rosebery, that «he flourished in an age of great men and small events». He was never subjected to any really dreadful ordeals. His writing was partly a political springboard, partly an emotional safety valve. Through a series of romantic and self-revealing novels, at times rather difficult to read, he avenged himself for the humiliation and setbacks that he, the Jewish stranger in an England ruled by aristocrats, suffered despite his fantastic career. He was not a great writer but a great actor, who played his

leading part dazzlingly. He could very well repeat Augustus' words of farewell: «Applaud, my friends, the comedy is over!»

Churchill's John Bull profile stands out effectively against the elder statesman's chalk-white, exotic mask with the black lock of hair on the forehead. The conservative Disraeli revered the English way of life and tradition which Churchill, radical in many respects, has in his blood, including steadfastness in the midst of the storm and the resolute impetus which marks both word and deed. He wears no mask, shows no sign of cleavage, has no complex, enigmatic nature. The analytical *morbidezza*, without which the modern generation finds it hard to imagine an author, is foreign to him. He is a man for whom reality's block has not fallen apart. There, simply, lies the world with its roads and goals under the sun, the stars, and the banners. His prose is just as conscious of the goal and the glory as a runner in the stadium. His every word is half a deed. He is heart and soul a late Victorian who has been buffeted by the gale, or rather one who chose of his own accord to breast the storm.

Churchill's political and literary achievements are of such magnitude that one is tempted to resort to portray him as a Caesar who also has the gift of Cicero's pen. Never before has one of history's leading figures been so close to us by virtue of such an outstanding combination. In his great work about his ancestor, Marlborough, Churchill writes, «Words are easy and many, while great deeds are difficult and rare.» Yes, but great, living, and persuasive words are also difficult and rare. And Churchill has shown that they too can take on the character of great deeds.

It is the exciting and colourful side of Churchill's writing which perhaps first strikes the reader. Besides much else, *My Early Life* (1930) is also one of the world's most entertaining adventure stories. Even a very youthful mind can follow with the keenest pleasure the hero's spirited start in life as a problem child in school, as a polo-playing lieutenant in the cavalry (he was considered too dense for the infantry), and as a war correspondent in Cuba, in the Indian border districts, in the Sudan, and in South Africa during the Boer War. Rapid movement, undaunted judgments, and a lively perception distinguish him even here. As a word-painter the young Churchill has not only verve but visual acuteness. Later he took up painting as a hobby, and in *Thoughts and Adventures* (1932) discourses charmingly on the joy it has given him. He loves brilliant colours and feels sorry for the poor brown ones. Nevertheless, Churchill paints better with words. His battle scenes have a matchless colouring. Danger is man's oldest mistress and in the heat of action the young officer was fired to an almost visionary clear-sightedness. On a visit to Omdurman many years ago I discovered how the final struggle in the crushing of the Mahdi's rebellion, as it is depicted in *The River War* (1899), was branded on my memory. I could see in front of me the dervish hordes brandishing their spears and guns, the ochre-yellow sand ramparts shot to pieces, the Anglo-Egyptian troops' methodical advance, and the cavalry charge which nearly cost Churchill his life.

Even old battles which must be dug out of dusty archives are described by Churchill with awesome clarity. Trevelyan masterfully depicts Marlborough's

campaigns, but in illusory power it is doubtful that Churchill's historic battle scenes can be surpassed. Take, for instance, the Battle of Blenheim. One follows in fascination the moves of the bloody chess game, one sees the cannon balls plough their furrows through the compact squares, one is carried away by the thundering charge and fierce hand-to-hand fighting of the cavalry; and after putting the book down one can waken in the night in a cold sweat, imagining he is right in the front rank of English redcoats who, without wavering, stand among the piles of dead and wounded loading their rifles and firing their flashing salvoes.

But Churchill became far more than a soldier and a delineator of war. Even in the strict but brilliant school of the parliamentary gamble for power he was, perhaps from the outset, something of a problem child. The young Hotspur learned, however, to bridle his impetuosity, and he quickly developed into an eminent political orator with the same gift of repartee as Lloyd George. His sallies, often severe, excluded neither warmth nor chivalry. In his alternation between Toryism and radicalism, he followed in the footsteps of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill. He has also portrayed the latter's short, uneasy, tragically interrupted political and personal life in a work which has an undisputed place of honour in England's profuse biographical literature.

Even the First World War, despite all setbacks, meant a vast expansion for Churchill as both politician and writer. In his historical works the personal and the factual elements have been intimately blended. He knows what he is talking about. In gauging the dynamics of events, his profound experience is unmistakable. He is the man who has himself been through the fire, taken risks, and withstood extreme pressure. This gives his words a vibrating power. Occasionally, perhaps, the personal side gets the upper hand. Balfour called *The World Crisis* (1923-29) «Winston's brilliant autobiography, disguised as world history.» With all due respect to archives and documents, there is something special about history written by a man who has himself helped to make it.

In his great book on the Duke of Marlborough (1933-38), whose life's work is so similar to Churchill's own, he makes an intrepid attack on his ancestor's detractors. I do not know what professional historians say of his polemic against Macaulay, but these diatribes against the great general's persistent haters and revilers are certainly diverting and temperamental.

The Marlborough book is not only a series of vivid battle scenes and a skillful defence of the statesman and warrior. It is also a penetrating study of an enigmatic and unique personality; it shows that Churchill, in addition to all else, is capable of real character-drawing. He returns again and again to the confusing mixture in Marlborough of methodical niggardliness and dazzling virtuosity: «His private fortune was amassed», he says, «upon the same principles as marked the staff-work of his campaigns, and was a part of the same design. It was only in love or on the battlefield that he took all risks. In these supreme exaltations he was swept from his system and rule of living, and blazed resplendent with the heroic virtues. In his marriage and in his victories the worldly prudence, the calculation, the reinsurance, which

regulated his ordinary life and sustained his strategy, fell from him like a too heavily embroidered cloak, and the genius within sprang forth in sure and triumphant command.» In his military enthusiasm Churchill forgets for a moment that Marlborough's famous and dearly loved Sarah was by no means one to let herself be ordered about. But it is a wonderful passage.

Churchill regretted that he had never been able to study at Oxford. He had to devote his leisure hours to educating himself. But there are certainly no educational gaps noticeable in his mature prose. Take, for example, Gr*eat Contemporaries* (1937), one of his most charming books. He is said to have moulded his style on Gibbon, Burke, and Macaulay, but here he is supremely himself What a deft touch and at the same time what a fund of human knowledge, generosity, and gay malice are in this portrait gallery!

Churchill's reaction to Bernard Shaw is very amusing, a piquant meeting between two of England's greatest literary personalities. Churchill cannot resist poking fun at Shaw's blithely irresponsible talk and flippancy, which contrasted with the latter's fundamental gravity. Half amused, half appalled, he winces at the way in which the incorrigibly clowning genius was forever tripping himself up and turning somersaults between the most extreme antitheses. It is the contrast between the writer, who must at all costs create surprises, and the statesman, whose task it is to meet and master them.

It is not easy to sum up briefly the greatness of Churchill's style. He says of his old friend, the Liberal statesman, John Morley, «Though in conversation he paraded and manœuvred nimbly and elegantly around his own convictions, offering his salutations and the gay compliments of old-time war to the other side, [he] always returned to his fortified camp to sleep.» As a stylist Churchill himself, despite his mettlesome chivalry, is not prone to such amiable arabesques. He does not beat about the bush, but is a man of plain speaking. His fervour is realistic, his striking – power is tempered only by broad-mindedness and humour. He knows that a good story tells itself. He scorns unnecessary frills and his metaphors are rare but expressive.

Behind Churchill the writer is Churchill the orator – hence the resilience and pungency of his phrases. We often characterize ourselves unconsciously through the praise we give others. Churchill, for instance, says of another of his friends, Lord Birkenhead, «As he warmed to his subject, there grew that glow of conviction and appeal, instinctive and priceless, which constitutes true eloquence.» The words might with greater justification have been said of Churchill himself.

The famous desert warrior, Lawrence of Arabia, the author of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, is another who has both made and written history. Of him Churchill says, «Just as an aeroplane only flies by its speed and pressure against the air, so he flew best and easiest in the hurricane.» It is again striking how Churchill here too speaks of the same genius that carried his own words through the storm of events.

Churchill's mature oratory is swift, unerring in its aim, and moving in its grandeur. There is the power which forges the links of history. Napoleon's proclamations were often effective in their lapidary style. But Churchill's eloquence in the fateful hours of freedom and human dignity was heart-stirring in quite another way. With his great speeches he has, perhaps, himself erected his most enduring monument.

Lady Churchill – The Swedish Academy expresses its joy at your presence and asks you to convey to Sir Winston a greeting of deep respect. A literary prize is intended to cast lustre over the author, but here it is the author who gives lustre to the prize. I ask you now to accept, on behalf of your husband, the 1953 Nobel Prize in Literature from the hands of His Majesty the King.

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Banquet Speech

As the Laureate was unable to be present at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1953, the speech was read by Lady Churchill

«The Nobel Prize in Literature is an honour for me alike unique and unexpected and I grieve that my duties have not allowed me to receive it myself here in Stockholm from the hands of His Majesty your beloved and justly respected Sovereign. I am grateful that I am allowed to confide this task to my wife.

The roll on which my name has been inscribed represents much that is outstanding in the world's literature of the twentieth century. The judgment of the Swedish Academy is accepted as impartial, authoritative, and sincere throughout the civilized world. I am proud but also, I must admit, awestruck at your decision to include me. I do hope you are right. I feel we are both running a considerable risk and that I do not deserve it. But I shall have no misgivings if you have none.

Since Alfred Nobel died in 1896 we have entered an age of storm and tragedy. The power of man has grown in every sphere except over himself. Never in the field of action have events seemed so harshly to dwarf personalities. Rarely in history have brutal facts so dominated thought or has such a widespread, individual virtue found so dim a collective focus. The fearful question confronts us; have our problems got beyond our control? Undoubtedly we are passing through a phase where this may be so. Well may we humble ourselves, and seek for guidance and mercy.

We in Europe and the Western world, who have planned for health and social security, who have marvelled at the triumphs of medicine and science, and who have aimed at justice and freedom for all, have nevertheless been witnesses of famine, misery, cruelty, and destruction before which pale the deeds of Attila and Genghis

Khan. And we who, first in the League of Nations, and now in the United Nations, have attempted to give an abiding foundation to the peace of which men have dreamed so long, have lived to see a world marred by cleavages and threatened by discords even graver and more violent than those which convulsed Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire.

It is upon this dark background that we can appreciate the majesty and hope which inspired the conception of Alfred Nobel. He has left behind him a bright and enduring beam of culture, of purpose, and of inspiration to a generation which stands in sore need. This world-famous institution points a true path for us to follow. Let us therefore confront the clatter and rigidity we see around us with tolerance, variety, and calm.

The world looks with admiration and indeed with comfort to Scandinavia, where three countries, without sacrificing their sovereignty, live united in their thought, in their economic practice, and in their healthy way of life. From such fountains new and brighter opportunities may come to all mankind. These are, I believe, the sentiments which may animate those whom the Nobel Foundation elects to honour, in the sure knowledge that they will thus be respecting the ideals and wishes of its illustrious founder.»

Prior to the speech, G. Liljestrand, Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, made the following remarks:

«In the past, several prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs and even two Presidents of the United States have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Now, for the first time, a great statesman has received the Prize in Literature. But Sir Winston Churchill is a recognized master of the English language, that wonderful and flexible instrument of human thought. His monumental biographies are already classics, and his works on contemporary history are an outflow of deep and intimate first-hand knowledge, of lucidity of style as well as of humour and generosity. But to Sir Winston the English language has also provided an important tool, with the aid of which part of his job has been finished. His words, accompanied by corresponding deeds, have inspired hope and confidence in millions from all parts of the world during times of darkness. With a slight alteration we might use his own words: Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to one man. We would like to ask Lady Churchill to convey to her husband our respectful and sincere admiration and reverence for what he has given us in his writings and his speeches.»

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Videos

[01] The Complete and Extraordinary Life of Winston Churchill

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhv_0RY3IDQ [1:43:08]

[02] Winston Churchill: How One Man's Stubbornness Won WW2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doI6T_YEygQ [1:00:40]

This documentary takes a look back at one of the most infamous men in British history, Winston Churchill. From his early life to how his political career set him on the path to leads his country to victory of Nazi Germany in WW2.

[03] Winston Churchill's Second Term: How a 77 Year Old Prime Minister Ran Britain

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zlH10JRVpk [47:26]

It's Winston's difficult second album, how do you follow beating Hitler? You drink brandy for breakfast, cut off some Malaysian heads, and frame all homosexuals as spies, that's how.

[04] Winston Churchill - Britain's PM <::> Documentary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoULXtnLpNg [1:44:39]

[05] The untold history of Winston Churchill and the British Empire

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbsfynApnVg [56:51]

Winston Churchill is one of the most biographed figures in modern history, held up as an orator and wartime strategist that turned the tide against Hitler and Nazi Germany.

[06] Winston Churchill: The Man Beyond the Myth | SLICE HISTORY | FULL DOCUMENTARY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJMVNhbleLQ [51:17]

Beyond the famous speeches and wealth of media material on the statesman, we span the century as seen from behind the scenes of an exceptional itinerary in order to capture the true dimension of one of the greatest European political figures. Like a thrilling biopic, by turn moving, funny and epic, our documentary is up to its hero.
Carefully remastered and colorized, the film draws from a wealth of visual and sound archives, to give an all-encompassing view of both the private and public man. Through the contrasted chapters of his existence, it thus offers a new, unseen before perspective on Churchill's character and how he related to power and his contemporaries in order to lift the veil on a colourful, puzzling, paradoxical and captivating personality.

[07] The Churchill cult is out of control: Tariq Ali on Winston Churchill

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vb0BKH3z1zs [26:58]

Churchill was a divisive, reactionary politician - unpopular even within his own party - and an open enemy of the working class. The life he lead was that of a racist imperialist, and he was sympathetic to fascism - a supporter of Mussolini and Franco. How has this wartime leader become a household god for many?

In this video (and his new book) Tariq Ali looks at the development of the Churchill cult: where it came from, why his legacy is being used in this way, and how long it will last.

[08] The Complete Rise of Winston Churchill in 2 Hours

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XE-xn32o1Y [2:11:03]

Explore the fascinating life of Winston Churchill, a complex figure known for his inspiring leadership and controversial beliefs. This documentary unveils the man behind the myth, from his aristocratic roots to his iconic status during WWII. Using rarely seen footage and personal photographs, discover the true story of Churchill, as told by those who knew him best. Witness his journey from a young officer to Britain's Prime Minister, and his relentless pursuit of greatness despite personal and political challenges.

[09] The Audacious Life of Winston Churchill | The Art of Manliness

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQG_Xu29Wdw [46:56]

When we seek an example of great leadership, one man who often comes to mind is Winston Churchill — the iconic, visionary prime minister, who guided his country through war and stood firmly for his beliefs and impervious to his critics. But how did Winston become the legendary British Bulldog?
My guest today seeks to answer that question in his biography, Churchill: Walking with Destiny. His name is Andrew Roberts, he's a journalist and historian, and we begin our conversation discussing why he thought another Churchill biography was needed. We then shift to the life of Churchill, beginning with a childhood in which young Winston often felt neglected. Andrew then discusses Churchill's military career, why Winston was so eager to see action on the frontlines, and how he parlayed those experiences into becoming the world's highest paid journalist by his mid-twenties. Andrew then explains how Churchill also became one of the 20th century's great historians and how his appreciation of history and sentimental outlook colored his worldview and shaped his leadership. We also discuss why Churchill was one of the few leaders to foresee the threat that Hitler posed. We end our conversation discussing whether some of the current criticisms of Churchill, such as the allegation that he masterminded genocide in India, really hold weight.

[10] The Power of Words: The Inspiring Leadership of Winston Churchill

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5oGljSlNe4 [1:04:27]

The Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs at the Bush School of Government and Public Service hosted Celia Sandys, Winston Churchill's granddaughter, for a lecture on Churchill's leadership through his speeches and writings.

[11] The Life And Legacy Of Winston Churchill

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcNH4W_vGmc [1:43:08]

Often touted as Britain's greatest Prime Minister, the story of Winston Churchill is one that is inseparable from WW2. This feature-length documentary tells his life story, from birth to leading Britain and The Allies to victory in The Second World War.

[12] Lectures in History: Winston Churchill, the Special Relationship and the Cold War

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjFEjZMCz9c [1:14:00]

American University professor Laura Beers teaches a class on Winston Churchill and the "special relationship" between Great Britain and the U.S during World War II and the Cold War.

[13] How Winston Churchill's Speeches helped to win WW2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3I_-5njblk [9:31]

Winston Churchill has many famous speeches. From 'We shall fight on the beaches' and 'Their finest hour', to 'Blood, toil, tears, and sweat' and 'The few', Churchill's words have shaped how we remember the Second World War. In the dark early days of the Second World War, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had few real weapons. Allied armies were in full retreat before a powerful Germany Army and invasion of Britain seemed very likely. Never one to shirk a challenge, Churchill did battle with words instead. The speeches he delivered at that time were some of the most powerful ever given in the English language. His words were defiant, heroic and human. They reached out to everyone in Britain, across Nazi-occupied Europe, and throughout the world. As journalist Beverley Nichols wrote, 'He mobilised the English language and sent it into battle.'

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International Churchill Society

{https://winstonchurchill.org/the-life-of-churchill/young-soldier/orders-decorations-and-medals/}

Excerpt from The Orders, Decorations and Medals of Sir Winston Churchill by Douglas S. Russell

As a young man, Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill set out to become a hero. In the event, he exceeded everyone's expectations, save perhaps his own. Churchill was the recipient of a remarkable variety of honors and awards. Few statesmen have received so many honorary degrees, freedoms of cities, honorary citizenships and memberships. Few have been named honorary citizens of the United States. Although several received the Nobel Peace Prize, none save Churchill received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Among Churchill's honors are 37 orders, decorations and medals received between 1885 and 1963. Readers have surely noticed photographs of him at various stages of his career in military uniform or court dress wearing rows of colorful ribbon bars or a long row of medals. Reading and research over the past 12 years has brought to light much information and detail concerning these awards about which little was published before.

Of the orders, decorations and medals Churchill received, 20 were awarded by Great Britain, three by France, two each by Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg and Spain, and one each by Egypt, Libya, Nepal, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United States. Ten were awarded for active service as an Army officer in Cuba, India, Egypt, South Africa, England, France, and Belgium. The greater number of awards were given in recognition of his service as a minister of the British government. All of the orders, medals and decorations awarded to Churchill have been located. Thirty-three are in the possession of his grandson, Winston S. Churchill, loaned for display at the Cabinet War Rooms, London. The other four were returned to the Sovereigns who granted them following Sir Winston's death in 1965. All photographs are of Churchill's actual awards, with the exception of the Order of the Garter insignia (collection of Spink & Son, Ltd., London) and the Danish and Netherlands orders, which are replicas on exhibit at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas.

In discussing Churchill's orders, decorations and medals it is important and useful to define one's terms. The awards discussed in this book are official ones given by national governments or heads of state for military or government services. They do not include diplomas, certificates, gifts, tokens or table medals from any source or medals from universities, local or state governments, or civil organizations public or private. Although the following definitions may not be universally accepted, they are used with consistency herein and will lend a clearer understanding and appreciation.

1. An **Order** is an institution, derived from the medieval monastic or secular orders of knighthood. Although originally closed fraternities, modern orders are honorific, having generally been created by a sovereign or head of state to reward meritorious service. An order is generally the highest honor a citizen may receive for a career or service of great distinction in the services of one's country. Membership in an order is generally granted by the sovereign or head of state, who is typically the "grand master" of the order. In the UK the King or Queen is the "Sovereign" of each order and the "Great [or Grand] Master" is a member of the Royal Family. Membership is usually limited to a specific, small number. Orders may have several classes of membership which are denoted by a variety of insignia or badges of rank and distinction. The badges are often referred to as "orders." The insignias typically are made of precious metals with enameled or jeweled designs.

2. A **Decoration** is an award conferred by a sovereign or national government for heroism, meritorious achievement or distinguished service. Decorations do not normally denote membership and are awarded for specific categories or types or service, civil or military, by an individual. Decorations usually take the form of crosses or medallions of gold, silver, bronze or enameled metal suspended from a ribbon and worn on the left side of the chest.

3. A **Medal** is an award given by a sovereign or national government to recognize the recipient's participation in a military campaign, royal coronation or other significant

event and is usually award to all who participated in the event. Medals are also given to recognize long periods of service in the military, in government, or in a royal household. Medals are usually medallion in form and are worn on the left side of the chest, suspended from a colorful ribbon.

I have written of Churchill's orders, decorations and medals as a chronology, thinking it best to let the story be told as it happened. In some cases this means the sequence in which the awards were earned rather than the order in which they were received. The following order of precedence lists the awards in the official ranking and the order in which Churchill wore them. This book is a history of one aspect of Churchill's career, one which I trust will be of interest both to those interested in orders, decorations and medals, and to those interested in Sir Winston Churchill.

The Order of Precedence

1. Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, UK, appointed 24Apr53, installed 14Jun54.
2. Order of Merit, UK, appointed 1Jan46, installed 8Jan46.
3. Order of the Companions of Honour, UK, appointed 19Oct22, invested 16Jun23.
4. India Medal, 1895 (clasp: Punjab Frontier 1897-98), UK, authorized 10Dec 1898.
5. Queen's Sudan Medal 1896-98, UK, authorized 27Mar 1899.
6. Queen's South Africa Medal 1899-1902 (clasps: Diamond Hill, Johannesburg, Relief of Ladysmith, Orange Free State, Tugela Heights, Cape Colony), UK, authorized 15Jul 1901.
7. 1914-1915 Star, UK, authorized 10Oct19.
8. British War Medal 1914-1918, UK, authorized 13Oct19.
9. Victory Medal, UK, authorized 4Jun20.
10. 1939-1945 Star, UK, authorized 9Oct45.
11. Africa Star, UK, authorized 9Oct45.
12. Italy Star, UK, authorized 2Aug45.
13. France and Germany Star, UK, authorized 9Oct45.
14. Defence Medal 1939-45, UK, authorized 9Oct45.
15. War Medal 1939-45, UK, authorized 11Dec46.
16. King George V Coronation Medal, UK, 1911.
17. King George V Silver Jubilee Medal, UK, 1935.
18. King George VI Coronation Medal, UK, 1937.
19. Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal, UK, 1953.
20. Territorial Decoration (King George V), UK, 31Oct24.
21. Cross of the Order of Military Merit, Red Ribbon, First Class, Spain, granted 6Dec 1895, ratified 25Jan 1896.
22. Grand Cordon of the Order of Leopold with Palm, Belgium, 15Nov45.
23. Knight Grand Cross, Order of the Lion of the Netherlands, Holland, May 1946.
24. Grand Cross, Order of the Oaken Crown, Luxembourg, 14Jul46.
25. Grand Cross with Chain, Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav, Norway, 11May48.
26. Order of the Elephant, Denmark, 9Oct50.
27. Order of Liberation, France, awarded 6Nov58.
28. Most Refulgent Order of the Star of Nepal, First Class, Nepal, 29Jun61.
29. Grand Sash of the High Order of Sayyid Mohammed bin Ali el Senoussi, Kingdom of Libya, awarded 14Apr62.
30. Army Distinguished Service Medal, United States, authorized 10May19, awarded 16Jul19.
31. War Cross with Palm, Belgium, 15Nov45.

32. Military Medal 1940-45, Luxembourg, 14Jul46.
33. Military Medal, France, 8May47.
34. War Cross with palm, France, 8May47.
35. Cuban Campaign Medal, 1895-98, Spain, awarded 1914.
36. Khedive's Sudan Medal (clasp: Khartoum), Egypt, 1899.
37. King Christian X's Liberty Medal, Denmark, 10Sep46.

NOTE: Kindly visit these Web Page to know MORE.

[01]https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_awards_and_honours_received_by_Winston_Churchill

[02] https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/honors-of-winston-churchill.html

[03] https://winstonchurchill.org/

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Sir Winston Churchill
A Chronology

Winston S. Churchill, 1874-1965

1874

November 30. Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill is born at 1:30 in the morning at Blenheim Palace. A descendant of John Churchill, first duke of Marlborough, he is the elder son of Lord Randolph Churchill, a prominent British politician, and Lady Randolph Churchill, an American originally named Jennie Jerome. Dr. Frederic Taylor, a local physician from Woodstock, handled the delivery.

December 27. Churchill is baptized in the chapel at Blenheim by the Reverend Henry William Yale.

1880

February 4. Churchill's brother, John Stranger Spencer Churchill, is born in Dublin.

1882

November 3. Churchill enters St. George's School, Ascot.

1884

September 16. Churchill enters the Misses Thomson School, Hove.

1886

March. Churchill is ill with pneumonia. He is treated by Dr. Robert Roose, and Lord and Lady Randolph rush to their son's bedside.

1888

April 17. Churchill enters Harrow in the lowest form.

1891

December 21. Churchill departs for France where he will spend the holidays with a French family in order to improve his ability in the language.

1892

April 8. Churchill wins the Public School Fencing Championships by beating fencers from Brafield and Tonbridge in tournament held at Aldershot.

August. Churchill learns the results of the entrance examination for Sandhurst. He fails the exams, placing 390 out of 693 candidates.

1893

January 10. During a stay at Bournemouth, Churchill falls thirty feet from a bridge. He is unconscious for three days before making a slow recovery.

February. Churchill is sent to Captain James's "crammer" in London for six months in order to pass the entrance examination for Sandhurst. He passes the examination on his third attempt.

August 3-29. In the company of his brother Jack and J.D.G. Little (an Eton tutor), Churchill completes a walking tour in Switzerland. At Lausanne Churchill and Jack nearly drown while rowing on the lake.

September 1. Churchill enters the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.

1894

December. Churchill passes out of Sandhurst eighth out his class of 150.

1895

January 24. After a prolonged illness, Lord Randolph Churchill dies in London.

February 20. Churchill is commissioned an army officer and joins the 4th Hussars, a cavalry regiment.

November-December. Churchill visits the United States and then travels to Cuba to observe the Spanish Army, then engaged in operations against Cuban rebels. He begins his career as a journalist by sending articles from Cuba to the *Daily Graphic*, a London newspaper.

1896

October 1. Posted to India, Churchill disembarks at Bombay with his regiment and entrains for Bangalore.

1897

July 26. While on leave in England, Churchill delivers his first political speech at a meeting of the Primrose League in Bath.

September 1. Churchill joins the Malakand Field Force on the North West Frontier of India.

1898

March 14. Churchill's first book, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, is published.
August 2. Churchill joins the 21st Lancers which forms part of Lord Kitchener's expedition to the Sudan.

September 2. Churchill takes part in the cavalry charge of the 21st Lancers at the Battle of Omdurman.

1899

February 24. As a member of the Hussars polo team, Churchill wins the prestigious Inter-Regimental Polo Tournament in India.

March. Churchill departs India. He resigns his army commission in order to enter British politics.

July 6. Churchill unsuccessfully contests the by-election at Oldham for the Conservatives, losing by fifteen hundred votes.

October 14. Churchill departs for South Africa to cover the Anglo-Boer War as a correspondent for the Morning Post.

November 6. *The River War*, Churchill's account of the reconquest of the Sudan, is published.
November 15. Churchill is captured by the Boers and imprisoned in a POW Camp in Pretoria.

December 12. Churchill escapes from the Boers and reaches Durban 11 days later.

1900

February 1. Churchill's only novel, *Savrola*, is published. Churchill later remarks, "I have consistently urged my friends to abstain from reading it."
February 28. After temporarily rejoining the British army, Churchill takes part in the relief of Ladysmith.

May 16. *London to Ladysmith*, the first of Churchill's two books on the South African War, is published.
June 2. Churchill cycles through Boer-held Johannesburg ahead of the British troops.

October 1. Churchill is elected Member of Parliament for Oldham for the Conservatives.

October 12. Churchill's second book on the South African War, *Ian Hamilton's March*, is published.
November. Churchill makes a lecture tour of Britain.

December. Churchill makes a lecture tour of the United States and Canada which lasts until February 1901. During the tour he meets Mark Twain, Theodore Roosevelt, and the American writer also named Winston Churchill.

1901
February 14. Churchill takes his seat in the House of Commons.

February 18. Churchill makes his maiden speech in the House of Commons, in which he bitterly criticizes the war in South Africa saying "if I were a Boer I hope I should be fighting in the field."

1902
December 10. Churchill present at the ceremony for opening of the Aswan dam.

1904
May 31. After disagreements with the Balfour Government over Free Trade, Churchill quits the Conservative Party and joins the Liberal Party.

1905
December 9. Churchill is appointed Under Secretary of State for the Colonies.

1906
January 2. Churchill's two-volume biography of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, is published.

January 13. Churchill is elected Member of Parliament for Manchester, Northwest, for the Liberals.

1907
April-May. Churchill attends the Colonial Conference held in London.

May 1. Churchill becomes Privy Councillor.

October. Churchill departs for a lengthy tour of East Africa, which includes traveling through Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, and Egypt.

1908

April 12. Churchill is appointed to the cabinet as President of the Board of Trade. He takes a prominent role in enacting the government's program of social legislation creating trade boards, labour exchanges, and unemployment and sickness insurance.

April 24. Churchill is defeated at a by-election for Manchester, Northwest as a Liberal candidate.

May 9. Churchill is elected Member of Parliament for Dundee, for the Liberals.

August 11. Churchill becomes engaged to Clementine Hozier at Blenheim.

September 12. Churchill marries Clementine Hozier at St. Margaret's, Westminster.

December. Churchill's *My African Journey* is published.

1909

July 11. Churchill's first child, Diana Spencer Churchill, is born.

September 6. Churchill delivers a combative and controversial speech on Lloyd George's budget at the Palace Theatre, Leicester.

November 13. Churchill is attacked by Miss Theresa Garnett, a suffragette, with a dog whip at Bristol railway station.

1910

January. Churchill is reelected Member of Parliament for Dundee for the Liberals.

February 14. Churchill is appointed Home Secretary.

November 8. Churchill incurs great controversy when he sends army troops and Metropolitan police to Tonypandy, Wales, to maintain order during a mining strike.

December 8. Churchill is reelected Member of Parliament for Dundee for the Liberals.

1911

January 3. Churchill appears in person to observe the police siege of two anarchists barricaded in a house in Sidney Street, East London.

May 28. Churchill's son, Randolph Frederick Edward Spencer Churchill, is born.

June 22. Churchill and Clementine ride in the procession for the coronation of King George V.

October 23. Churchill is appointed First Lord of the Admiralty. He modernizes the navy, establishes the Royal Flying Corps, and supports the construction of an early version of the tank, then known as "Winston's Folly."

1913
Although he never solos, Churchill takes up flying and makes many flights.

1914
July 28. Churchill orders the British naval fleets to take up battle stations. Britain declares war on Germany on August 4, 1914.

October 3-6. Churchill organizes and accompanies the expedition to defend Antwerp.

October 7. Sarah Millicent Hermione Churchill, Churchill's second daughter, is born.

1915
February 19. The Royal Navy begins the Gallipoli Campaign with the bombardment of Turkish fortifications at the Dardanelles. The expedition, devised and promoted by Churchill, ends in a prolonged and ultimately unsuccessful ground campaign.

May 25. Churchill is dismissed as First Lord of the Admiralty by Prime Minister Asquith.

May 27. Churchill is appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

June. While at Hoe Farm in Surrey, Churchill takes up painting.

November 11. Churchill resigns from the government. He departs seven days later to join the Grenadier Guards regiment in France.

1916
January 5. Churchill takes command of the 6th Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers in France.

March 7. While on leave from the front, Churchill suffers a severe political setback when he condemns the government's conduct of the war in a speech in the House of Commons and calls for the return of Sir John Fisher as First Sea Lord.

May 7. After six months' service in the trenches, Churchill returns to Britain to resume his political career.

1917
July 17. Churchill is appointed Minister of Munitions in Prime Minister David Lloyd-George's cabinet. He pushes forward production of the new tanks.

July 30. Churchill is reelected Member of Parliament for Dundee for the Liberals.

1918
November 11. On the night of the Armistice, Churchill dines with Lloyd George and F.E. Smith at 10 Downing Street.

November 15. Churchill's third daughter, Marigold Frances Churchill, is born.

December 14. Churchill is reelected Member of Parliament for Dundee for the Liberals.

1919

January 9. Churchill is appointed Secretary of State for War and Air.

February 14-17. Churchill attends the Paris Peace Conference and unsuccessfully presses for military intervention in the Russian Civil War.

November 17. The report of the Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors is released. It concludes that it was "primarily due to the receptivity, courage, and driving force of the Rt. Hon Winston Spencer Churchill that the general idea of the use of such an instrument of warfare as the Tank was converted into a practical shape."

1921

February 13. Churchill is appointed Secretary of State for the Colonies. He is a member of the Cabinet committee that negotiates a treaty with the leaders of the Irish Rebellion.

March 12-22. Churchill chairs the Cairo Conference on the future of Iraq and British policy in the Middle East.

March 20. Churchill, Clementine, Lawrence of Arabia, and Gertrude Bell visit the pyramids.

June 29. Lady Randolph Churchill dies.

August 23. Marigold Frances Churchill dies.

December 6. Churchill is one of the signatories of the treaty between Great Britain and Ireland.

1922

September-October. Churchill supports Prime Minister Lloyd-George in the Chanak Crisis.

September 15. Churchill's fourth daughter, Mary Churchill, is born. That same day Churchill buys Chartwell Manor in Kent.

November 15. Churchill is defeated in the general election at Dundee, standing as a National Liberal candidate. He later writes, "I found myself without office, without a seat, without a party, and even without an appendix."

1923

April 10. The first volume of the *World Crisis*, Churchill's account of the First World War, is published. The fifth and last volume of the work is published in 1931.

December 6. Churchill is defeated in the general election at Leicester West standing as a Liberal candidate.

1924

March 19. Standing as an Independent Anti-Socialist candidate, Churchill is defeated at the by-election for Westminster Abbey.

October 29. Churchill is elected as a Member of Parliament for Epping as a Constitutionalist candidate.

November 6. Churchill is appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer in Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's Conservative government. He later rejoins the Conservative Party.

1925

January 14. Churchill attends the Inter-Allied Finance Conference held in Paris.

April 28. In his first budget as Chancellor, Churchill returns Britain to the Gold Standard at the prewar parity.

1926

April 27. Churchill presents his second budget as Chancellor to the House of Commons.

May 5-13. During the General Strike, Churchill edits the British Gazette, a newspaper published by the government.

July 7. Churchill speaks in a raucous debate on the British Gazette in the House of Commons. He declares, "I decline utterly to be impartial as between the fire brigade and the fire."

July 12. In London, Churchill signs an agreement for the settlement of the War Debt of France to Great Britain.

1927

January 8. While in Malta, Churchill plays his last game of polo.

January 14. During a visit to Rome, Churchill meets Italian leader Benito Mussolini.

April 11. Churchill presents the budget to the House of Commons.

1928

April 24. Churchill delivers his fourth budget at the House of Commons in which the first British tax on petrol is introduced.

October 10. Under the occupation of bricklayer, Churchill is admitted to the Amalgamated Union of Building Trades Workers.

1929

April 15. Churchill delivers his fifth budget to the House of Commons.

May 30. Although Churchill is reelected as a Member of Parliament for Epping for the Conservatives in the general election, the Conservatives lose the election and he leaves cabinet office.

August 3-November 5. Churchill completes a tour of Canada and the United States during which he meets Charlie Chaplin and William Randolph Hearst, as well as visits Prime Minister Mackenzie King in Ottawa and President Herbert Hoover at the White House. He loses a fortune in the stock market crash.

December 13. Churchill speaks at his installation as Chancellor at Bristol University.

1930

October 20. Churchill's autobiography, *My Early Life*, is published.

1931

January 27. Churchill resigns from the Conservative shadow cabinet over policy for India and enters the "wilderness."

February 23. Churchill opposes India's constitutional negotiations in a speech to the West Essex Conservatives in which he calls Gandhi "a seditious Middle Temple lawyer."

October 27. Churchill is reelected as a Member of Parliament for Epping for the Conservatives in the general election.

December 13. Churchill is injured when he is knocked down by an automobile in New York City, at the start of a lecture tour.

December 31. Churchill departs New York to complete his recovery in the Bahamas.

1932

January 25. Churchill returns to New York to complete a lecture tour which runs through March.

February 13. Churchill is received at the White House by President Hoover.

May 13. In a speech to the House of Commons, Churchill warns against France and Germany being equal in military strength saying he would ask those who do, "Do you wish for war?"

November 10. Churchill's book *Thoughts and Adventures* is published.

December 12. Churchill gives the bride away at the wedding of his daughter Diana to John Bailey held at St. Margaret's, Westminster.

1933

March 10. In the House of Commons, Churchill opposes the government's proposals to reduce spending on the air force for the second year in a row.

June 28. Churchill speaks on India at a meeting of the Conservative Central Council in London, but fails to change the government's policy.

October 6. *Marlborough*, Churchill's biography of his ancestor, is published. The fourth and last volume in the work is published in 1938.
November 7. Churchill warns that Germany has already begun to rearm in the House of Commons.

1934
March 8. In a parliamentary debate over Air Estimates, Churchill urges an increased spending on the Royal Air Force and stronger air defenses.

November 28. Churchill warns in a speech in the House of Commons that Germany will reach parity in air strength in 1935.

1935
May 21. Churchill attends the funeral of T.E. Lawrence at Moreton Church, Dorset.

July 9. Churchill joins the Committee of Imperial Defence on Air Defence Research.

September 16. Churchill gives the bride away at the wedding of his daughter Diana to Duncan Sandys held at St. Ethelburga's Church, Bishopsgate. There are three children from the marriage: Julian (born 1936), Edwina (born 1938), and Celia (born 1943)

October 29. Germany makes a diplomatic protest to Britain over an article written by Churchill on Hitler that was published in the *Strand*.
November 14. Churchill is reelected as a Member of Parliament for Epping for the Conservatives.

1936
November 12. Churchill makes a brilliant speech in the House of Commons in the defence debate.

November-December. Churchill incurs great unpopularity by advising and supporting King Edward VIII during the Abdication Crisis.

December 7. Churchill can not make himself heard amid the uproar and is shouted down in the House of Commons as he pleads on the King's behalf.

1937
October 4. *Great Contemporaries* by Churchill is published.
1938
March 14. Churchill speaks on the German annexation of Austria in the House of Commons.

June 24. *Arms and the Covenant*, a collection of Churchill's speeches, is published.
October 5. Churchill denounces the Munich Agreement in the House of Commons as "a defeat without a war."

1939
June 27. Churchill's *Step by Step* is published.
July. A large billboard appears in the Strand, London which reads "What Price Churchill?"

September 3. With the start of the Second World War, Churchill is appointed for a second time the First Lord of the Admiralty.

October 1. Churchill makes his first radio broadcast of the war.

October 4. Churchill attends the marriage of Randolph Churchill to Pamela Digby at St. John's, Smith Square. There is one son from marriage, Winston Churchill, Jr., who was born on October 10, 1940.

1940
May 8. Churchill vigorously defends the government in the Norway debate in the House of Commons.

May 10. Neville Chamberlain resigns and Churchill is appointed Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. He forms a coalition government that includes the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal parties.

May 13. Addressing the House of Commons for the first time as prime minister, Churchill declares "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat."

May 28. Churchill makes a statement in the House of Commons on the surrender of Belgium warning of "hard and heavy tidings to come."

June 4. After the British evacuation at Dunkirk, Churchill makes the "We shall fight on the beaches" speech to the House Commons.

June. Churchill makes a visit to France for discussions with the Reynaud government. His offer of an Anglo-French Union is rejected by the French cabinet.

June 18. Churchill delivers the "Their Finest Hour" speech to the House of Commons.

July 4. Churchill speaks on the destruction of the French fleet in the House of Commons.

August. Churchill negotiates the "Destroyers for Bases" agreement with President Franklin Roosevelt in which Britain obtains fifty American destroyers in exchange for leases on bases in the West Indies, Bermuda, and Newfoundland. The agreement is finalized in 1941.

August 20. With the "Battle of Britain" underway, Churchill delivers "The Few" speech to the House of Commons.

October 9. Churchill accepts the leadership of the Conservative Party.

December. Churchill urges President Roosevelt to provide material and economic support to the British war effort which eventually results in the "Lend-Lease Agreement."

December 18. Churchill visits Harrow for its "Songs Night," an annual pilgrimage he will make for the next 20 years.

1941

February 9. Churchill makes the "Give Us the Tools" speech in a broadcast from London.

June 22. Churchill offers aid to the Soviet Union after the German invasion that began earlier that day in a broadcast from London.

August 9-12. Churchill meets President Roosevelt aboard HMS *Prince of Wales* and USS *Augusta* at Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. The Atlantic Charter is drafted and signed by Churchill and Roosevelt.
December 7. Churchill is at Chequers when he learns of the Japanese attack and speaks with Roosevelt by telephone.

December 22. Churchill arrives in the United States for the Washington Conference. Lasting until January 14, 1942 the conference coordinates the combined war effort. With President Roosevelt, he lights the National Christmas tree.

December 26. Churchill addresses both houses of Congress.

December 30. During a brief visit to Canada, Churchill addresses the House of Commons.

1942

February 19. The composition of Churchill's new War Cabinet is announced.

March. Sir Stafford Cripps is dispatched by Churchill and the cabinet to India to negotiate a constitutional settlement.

May 26. The Anglo-Soviet Treaty is signed in London by Churchill and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheskav Molotov.

June 18. Churchill arrives in Washington by air for meetings with Roosevelt.

July 2. Following the surrender of the British garrison at Tobruk, a motion of "No Confidence" in the Churchill government is debated in the House Commons. The motion is defeated 475 to 25.

August. Churchill flies to Cairo with his senior advisers to review the military situation in the Middle East. He dismisses General Auchinleck from command and appoints General Alexander in his place with Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery to command the Eighth Army.

August 12. Churchill arrives in Moscow for meetings with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin.

1943

January 14-24. At the Casablanca Conference, Churchill and President Roosevelt decide on a policy of "unconditional surrender" for the enemy.

January 30. Churchill meets Turkish President Ismet Inonu at Adana in southern Turkey.

May 11-25. At the second Washington Conference, Churchill and Roosevelt agree to delay the invasion of France in May 1944.

May 19. Churchill addresses the US Congress in Washington.

June 1. Churchill addresses British soldiers at the Roman Amphitheatre in Carthage.

August 17-24. Churchill leads the British delegation of diplomatic and military advisors at the First Quebec Conference with President Roosevelt.

November-December. At the Cairo Conference Churchill and Roosevelt are joined by Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek in discussions of allied strategy.

November 28-December 1. At the Tehran Conference Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin meet together for the first time.

December 12. Churchill falls ill with pneumonia in Tunisia and convalesces in Marrakech from late December 1943 to January 1944.

1944

May. Churchill attends the Dominion Prime Ministers Conference held in London.

June 6. At midday Churchill addresses House of Commons announcing the liberation of Rome and the Normandy landings.

June 12. Six days after D-Day, Churchill visits the Allied forces in Normandy.

August 10-28. Churchill travels to Algiers, visits the Italian front, and observes the amphibious landings in southern France. He holds conversations with Yugoslav Partisan leader Tito in Naples and has an audience with Pope Pius XII in Rome.

September 12-16. At the Second Quebec Conference, Churchill and Roosevelt meet to discuss Allied strategy and plan for the post-war occupation of Germany.

October 9-19. At the Moscow Conference with Joseph Stalin, Churchill agrees to zones of influence in Eastern Europe.

November 10-14. Churchill visits recently liberated Paris with Charles De Gaulle and inspects the frontlines at Vosges.

December 25-29. Churchill is in Athens to negotiate an agreement between Greek political factions.

1945

February 2. Churchill meets with Roosevelt and the Combined Chiefs of Staff aboard the USS *Quincy* at the Grand Harbour, Malta.
February 4-11. Churchill attends Yalta Conference with President Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin.

February 15. Churchill meets with Roosevelt aboard an American cruiser in the harbour at Alexandria, Egypt.

February 16-17. In Egypt, Churchill holds separate meetings with the Emperor of Ethiopia, King Ibn Saud, the King of Egypt, and the president of the Syrian Republic.

March 5. Churchill observes the operations of the 21st Army Group in the crossing the Rhine.

May 8. Churchill announces the end of the war in Europe in the House of Commons.

May 23. With the surrender of Germany, the British coalition government is dissolved. Churchill forms a "Caretaker Government" and a general election is scheduled.

June 4. In his first broadcast of the election, Churchill makes his Gestapo speech.

July 16. In Berlin, Churchill inspects the ruins of Hitler's Chancellery and bunker.

July 17-25. At the Potsdam Conference, Churchill meets with President Harry Truman and Stalin to discuss surrender terms for Japan and post-war boundaries for Europe.

July 26. The results of the general election are announced. The Conservatives are defeated and Clement Attlee succeeds Churchill as Prime Minister. Churchill is reelected as a Member of Parliament and becomes Leader of Opposition in the House of Commons.

August 15. Churchill speaks on the surrender of Japan in the House of Commons.

1946

January 1. Churchill is awarded the Order of Merit.

January-March. Churchill travels to the United States and Cuba and visits President Truman at the White House.

March 5. With Truman in attendance, Churchill delivers the "Iron Curtain" speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri.

September 19. After receiving an honorary degree at Zurich, Churchill delivers a speech urging the creation of a "kind of United States of Europe."

1947

February 11. Churchill gives the bride away at the wedding of his daughter Mary to Christopher Soames held at St. Margaret's, Westminster. There are five children from the marriage: Arthur (born 1948), Emma (born 1949), Jeremy (born 1952), Charlotte (born 1954), and Rupert (born 1959)

February 23. With Churchill in attendance his brother, John Strange Spencer Churchill, dies at the age of 67 in London.

May 3. Two of Churchill's paintings, *Winter Sunshine* and *The Loup River*, are exhibited at the Royal Academy after he submitted his works under the name of David Walker.

1948

May 7. Churchill attends the inaugural Congress of Europe at The Hague.

June 21. The first volume of Churchill's *The Second World War* is published. The sixth and final volume of the work is published in 1953.

November 2. Churchill attends a luncheon at the Savoy in honor of the marriage of his son Randolph to June Osborne. There is a daughter from the marriage, Arabella, born November 30, 1949.

1949

March-April. Churchill visits the United States.

August 25. Having established a racing stable earlier in the year, Churchill's horse, Colonist II, wins at the Salisbury races.

1950

February 23. Although Churchill is reelected Conservative Member of Parliament for Woodford, the Labour Party under Attlee retain power in the general election.

1951

October 25. Churchill is reelected Conservative Member of Parliament for Woodford. The Conservative Party wins the general election and Churchill returns as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence.

1952

January 4-22. Churchill visits North America to hold meetings with Truman in Washington and Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent in Ottawa.

January 17. Churchill addresses the United States Congress in Washington.

February 7. Churchill pays tribute to King George VI as a "model" sovereign in a eulogy broadcast from London.

March 1. Churchill relinquishes duties as Minister of Defence, while remaining as Prime Minister.

1953

April 24. Queen Elizabeth II confers the Knight of the Garter on Churchill.

June 2. Churchill present at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

June 23. Churchill suffers a serious stroke.

October 10. Churchill addresses the Conservative party conference at Margate.

October 13. Churchill is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. As Churchill is previously scheduled to attend the Bermuda Conference, Clementine and his daughter Mary travel to Stockholm in December to accept on his behalf.

December 4-8. Churchill attends the Bermuda Conference with President Dwight Eisenhower and French Prime Minister Joseph Laniel.

1954

June 14. Churchill is installed as a Knight of the Garter.

June 25-30. Churchill visits the United States and Canada to meet President Eisenhower in Washington and Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent in Ottawa.

October 9. Churchill speaks on "Peace through Strength" at the Conservative party conference at Blackpool.

November 30. Churchill attends a ceremony at Westminster Hall on the occasion of his 80th birthday. The Lords and the Commons combined to present a portrait of Churchill by Graham Sutherland, which is later ordered destroyed by Clementine.

1955

April 5. At the age of eighty, Churchill resigns as Prime Minister. He declines the offer of a dukedom from Queen Elizabeth II to remain as a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons.

May 26. Churchill is reelected Member of Parliament for Woodford for the Conservatives.

1956

May 10. Churchill is awarded the Charlemagne Prize at Aachen, Germany.

April 23. The first volume of *A History of the English Speaking Peoples* is published. The fourth and final volume of the work is published in 1958.

1958

September 12. Churchill and Clementine mark their Golden wedding anniversary at the Villa Capponcina, Lord Beaverbrook's estate in France.

1959

May 6. Churchill speaks on "Union of the English-Speaking Peoples" at the White House.

September 1. Churchill attends a reunion dinner hosted by Eisenhower at the residence of the American ambassador in London with many of the leading military figures of the war in attendance.

October 8. Churchill is reelected Member of Parliament for Woodford for the Conservatives.

1960

April 6. Churchill is visited by Charles de Gaulle at his home at Hyde Park Gate, London.

1961

April. Churchill makes his final visit to the United States.

1963

April 9. After a vote of both houses of Congress, President John F. Kennedy confers honorary American citizenship on Winston Churchill. Too ill to attend, Churchill's son Randolph accepts on his behalf at a White House ceremony.

October 19. Churchill's daughter Diana dies by suicide.

1964

July 27. Churchill attends the House of Commons for the last time. He does not stand as a candidate at the October 15, 1964 general election and steps down as a Member of Parliament.

November 30. Churchill makes his last public appearance at the window of No. 28 Hyde Park Gate on the occasion of his 90th birthday.

1965

January 24. On the seventieth anniversary of his father's death, Churchill dies in London.

January 27-30. Churchill lies in state at Westminster Hall as 300,000 people file past.

January 30. A state funeral for Churchill is held at St. Paul's Cathedral. He is buried next to his parents in Bladon churchyard, a short distance from Blenheim Palace.

June 15. Clementine Churchill takes her seat in the House of Lords as Lady Spencer-Churchill, a life peerage.

1966

The first volume of *Winston S. Churchill*, the official biography of Churchill's life, is published. The first two volumes are written by his son Randolph. After Randolph's death, Sir Martin Gilbert assumes the authorship of the biography.

1968

June 6. Randolph Churchill dies at his home at East Bergholt, Suffolk.

1977

December 12. Clementine Churchill dies at age of 92 at her flat in Princess Gate, Hyde Park, London.

1982

September 24. Sarah Churchill dies at the age of 67 at her home in London.

2014

May 31. Lady Soames dies at the age of 91 in London.

Also visit these Web Pages :

01]
https://archives.chu.cam.ac.uk/collections/churchill-papers/sir-winston-churchill-chronology/

02]
https://historyworld.net/featured-timelines/people/churchill

03]
https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/churchill/interactive/_html/1_00_00.html

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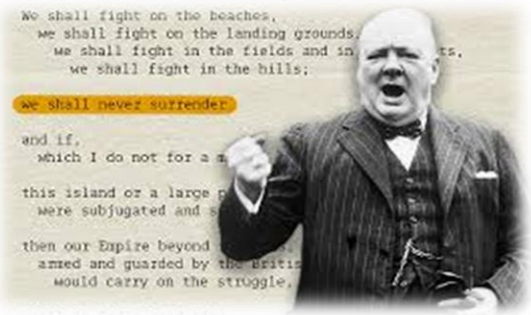
We shall fight on the beaches,
we shall fight on the landing grounds,
we shall fight in the fields and in
we shall fight in the hills;
We shall never surrender
and if,
this island or a large
were subjugated and
then our Empire beyond
armed and guarded by
would carry on the struggle,

21 Jul 1899

2 Jul 1961

Ernest Hemingway

Nobel Prize in Literature 1954

Born: 21 July 1899, Oak Park, IL, USA
Died: 2 July 1961, Ketchum, ID, USA
Residence at the time of the award: USA
Prize motivation:

"for his mastery of the art of narrative, most recently demonstrated in The Old Man and the Sea, and for the influence that he has exerted on contemporary style"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1954/hemingway/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize in

- Literature 1947, by Hjalmar Gullberg
- Literature 1950, by Anders Österling
- Literature 1953, by Elias Wessén
- Literature 1954, by Leo von Hibler

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Links to other sites

The Official Hemingway Society web site – which provides information on conferences, etc., and contains the Society Newsletter, and where the useful The Hemingway Review Index can be downloaded.

An audio web site for hearing Hemingway read selections from his own works. Readings include a recording by a Havana , Cuba, radio station of Hemingway reading his "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech", followed by a speech Hemingway gave to introduce a production of his play "The Fifth Column."

The University of South Carolina has a major modern American literature collection. The Speiser and Easterling-Hallman Foundation Collection is centered on a superb collection of the books of Ernest Hemingway, with correspondence, transcripts, and proofs.

Information about Hemingway copyrights in published and unpublished material is available from the Hemingway Foundation

'American Masters: Ernest Hemingway' from PBS
On Ernest Hemingway from Pegasos Authors' Calendar

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Photo Gallery

Ernest Hemingway poses with a water buffalo while on safari in Africa, 1953-1954.

Ernest Hemingway at his home in Cuba, the Finca Vigía, ca 1947.

Ernest Hemingway and his sons Patrick (left) and Gregory, with cats Good Will, Princessa, and Boise, outside their home Finca Vigía in San Francisco de Paula, Cuba, November 1946.

Ernest Hemingway fishing, Key West, 1928.

Ernest Hemingway, American Red Cross volunteer, recuperates from wounds at ARC Hospital, Milan, Italy, September 1918.

**Ernest Hemingway fishing in Horton's Creek,
near Walloon Lake, Michigan, July 1904.**

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Award Ceremony 1954 <:> Video

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1954/award-video/}

Inside the Stockholm Concert Hall, a festively dressed audience is waiting. The Swedish Royal family enters: King Gustaf VI Adolf, Queen Louise, Princesses Sibylla and Margaretha and Princes Wilhelm and Bertil. The Nobel Laureates enter the scene.

After Birger Ekeberg delivered his presentation speech, each Nobel Laureate was introduced and the Nobel Prizes awarded. Professor Gunnar Waller introduced the Physics Laureates, Max Born and Walther Bothe (Professor Bothe's award was received by his daughter Elena Riedel); the Chemistry Laureate, Linus Pauling, was introduced by Professor Gunnar Hägg; Professor Sven Gard introduced the Nobel Laureates in Physiology or Medicine, John F. Enders, Thomas H. Weller and Frederick C. Robbins; and Dr Anders Österling spoke for the absent Nobel Laureate in Literature, Ernest Hemingway; John C. Cabot, United States Ambassador to Sweden, received the Nobel Prize on behalf of Mr Hemingway.

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Anders Österling, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy

In our modern age, American authors have set their stamp more and more strongly on the general physiognomy of literature. Our generation in particular has, during the last few decades, seen a reorientation of literary interest which implies not only a temporary change in the market but, indeed, a shifting of the mental horizon, with far-reaching consequences. All these swiftly rising new authors from the United States, whose names we now recognize as stimulating signals, had one thing in common: they took full advantage of the Americanism to which they were born. And the European public greeted them with enthusiasm; it was the general wish that Americans should write as Americans, thereby making their own contribution to the contest in the international arena.

One of these pioneers is the author who is now the focus of attention. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Ernest Hemingway, more than any of his American colleagues, makes us feel we are confronted by a still young nation which seeks and finds its exact form of expression. A dramatic tempo and sharp curves have also characterized Hemingway's own existence, in many ways so unlike that of the average literary man. With him, this vital energy goes its own way, independent of the pessimism and the disillusionment so typical of the age. Hemingway evolved his style in the herd school of journalistic reporting. In the editorial office of the Kansas City newspaper where he served his apprenticeship, there was a kind of pressman's catechism, the first dictum of which was: «Use short sentences. Use short paragraphs.» Hemingway's purely technical training clearly led to an artistic self-discipline of uncommon strength. Rhetoric, he has said, is merely the blue sparks from the dynamo. His master in older American literature was Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn*, with its rhythmical stream of direct and unconventional narrative prose.

The young journalist from Illinois was flung headlong into the First World War when he volunteered to serve as an ambulance driver in Italy, where he received his baptism of fire at the Piave front and was severely wounded by shell splinters. The nineteen-year-old's first violent experience of war is an essential factor in Hemingway's biography. Not that he was daunted by it; on the contrary, he found that it was a priceless asset for a writer to see war at first hand – like Tolstoy at Sevastopol – and to be able to depict it truthfully. Several years were to elapse, however, before he could bring himself to give an artistically complete account of his painfully confused impressions from the Piave front in 1918: the result was the novel *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929, with which he really made his name, even if two very

talented books with a European post-war setting, *In Our Time* (1942) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), had already given proof of his individuality as a storyteller. In the following years, his instinctive predilection for harrowing scenes of action and grim spectacle drew him to Africa with its big-game hunting and to Spain with its bullfighting. When the latter country was transformed into a theatre of war, he found inspiration there for his second significant novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), in which an American champion of liberty fights for «man's dignity» – a book in which the writer's personal feelings seem more deeply involved than anywhere else.

When mentioning these principal elements in his production, one should not forget that his narrative skill often attains its highest point when cast in a smaller mould, in the laconic, drastically pruned short story, which, with a unique combination of simplicity and precision, nails its theme into our consciousness so that every blow tells. Such a masterpiece, more than any other, is *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), the unforgettable story of an old Cuban fisherman's duel with a huge swordfish in the Atlantic. Within the frame of a sporting tale, a moving perspective of man's destiny is opened up; the story is a tribute to the fighting spirit, which does not give in even if the material gain is nil, a tribute to the moral victory in the midst of defeat. The drama is enacted before our eyes, hour by hour, allowing the robust details to accumulate and take on momentous significance. «But man is not made for defeat», the book says. «A man can be destroyed but not defeated.»

It may be true that Hemingway's earlier writings display brutal, cynical, and callous sides which may be considered at variance with the Nobel Prize's requirement for a work of an ideal tendency. But on the other hand, he also possesses a heroic pathos which forms the basic element in his awareness of life, a manly love of danger and adventure with a natural admiration for every individual who fights the good fight in a world of reality overshadowed by violence and death. In any event, this is the positive side of his cult of manliness, which otherwise is apt to become

demonstrative, thereby defeating its own ends. It should be remembered, however, that courage is Hemingway's central theme – the bearing of one who is put to the test and who steels himself to meet the cold cruelty of existence, without, by so doing, repudiating the great and generous moments.

On the other hand, Hemingway is not one of those authors who write to illustrate theses and principles of one kind or another. A descriptive writer must be objective and not try to play God the Father – this he learned while still in the editorial office in Kansas City. That is why he can conceive of war as a tragic fate having a decisive effect on the whole of his generation; but

he views it with a calm realism, void of illusion, which disdains all emotional comment, a disciplined objectivity, stronger because it is hard-won.

Hemingway's significance as one of this epoch's great moulders of style is apparent in both American and European narrative art over the past twenty-five years, chiefly in the vivid dialogue and the verbal thrust and parry, in which he has set a standard as easy to imitate as it is difficult to attain. With masterly skill he reproduces all the nuances of the spoken word, as well as those pauses in which thought stands still and the nervous mechanism is thrown out of gear. It may sometimes sound like small talk, but it is not trivial when one gets to know his method. He prefers to leave the work of psychological reflection to his readers, and this freedom is of great benefit to him in spontaneous observation.

When one surveys Hemingway's production, definite scenes flare up in the memory – Lieutenant Henry's flight in the rain and mud after the panic at Caporetto, the desperate blowing up of the bridge in the Spanish mountains when Jordan sacrifices his life, or the old fisherman's solitary fight with the sharks in the nocturnal glow of lights from Havana.

Moreover, one may trace a distinctive linking thread – let us say a symbolic warp reaching back a hundred years in the loom of time – between Hemingway's latest work, *The Old Man and The Sea*, and one of the classic creations of American literature, Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*, the white whale who is pursued in blind rage by his enemy, the monomaniac sea captain. Neither Melville nor Hemingway wanted to create an allegory; the salt ocean depths with all their monsters are sufficiently rewarding as a poetic element. But with different means, those of romanticism and of realism, they both attain the same theme – a man's capacity of endurance and, if need be, of at least daring the impossible. «A man can be destroyed but not defeated.»

This year's Nobel Prize in Literature has therefore been awarded to one of the great authors of our time, one of those who, honestly and undauntedly, reproduces genuine features in the hard countenance of the age. Hemingway, now fifty-six years old, is the fifth American author so far to be honoured in this way. As the Prize winner himself is unfortunately unable to be present for reasons of health, the Prize will now be handed to the United States Ambassador.

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Banquet speech

As the Laureate was unable to be present at the Nobel Banquet
at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1954, the speech
was read by John M. Cabot, United States Ambassador to Sweden

«Having no facility for speech-making and no command of oratory nor any domination of rhetoric, I wish to thank the administrators of the generosity of Alfred Nobel for this Prize.

No writer who knows the great writers who did not receive the Prize can accept it other than with humility. There is no need to list these writers. Everyone here may make his own list according to his knowledge and his conscience.

It would be impossible for me to ask the Ambassador of my country to read a speech in which a writer said all of the things which are in his heart. Things may not be immediately discernible in what a man writes, and in this sometimes he is fortunate; but eventually they are quite clear and by these and the degree of alchemy that he possesses he will endure or be forgotten.

Writing, at its best, is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer's loneliness but I doubt if they improve his writing. He grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness and often his work deteriorates. For he does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day.

For a true writer each book should be a new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment. He should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with great luck, he will succeed.

How simple the writing of literature would be if it were only necessary to write in another way what has been well written. It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him.

I have spoken too long for a writer. A writer should write what he has to say and not speak it. Again I thank you.»

Prior to the speech, H.S. Nyberg, Member of the Swedish Academy, made the following comment:

«Another deep regret is that the winner of this year's Nobel Prize in Literature, Mr. Ernest Hemingway, on account of ill health has to be absent from our celebration. We wish to express our admiration for the eagle eye with which he has observed, and for the accuracy with which he has interpreted the human existence of our turbulent times; also for the admirable restraint with which he has described their naked struggle. The human problems which he has treated are relevant to all of us, living as we do in the confused conditions of modern life; and few authors have exercised such a wide influence on contemporary literature in all countries. It is our sincere hope that he will soon recover health and strength in pursuit of his life-work.»

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Article

A Case of identity: Ernest Hemingway

This article was published on 28 August 2001.

by Anders Hallengren

* **Anders Hallengren** (1950-2024) was an associate professor of Comparative Literature and a research fellow in the Department of History of Literature and the History of Ideas at Stockholm University. He served as consulting editor for literature at Nobelprize.org. Dr. Hallengren was a fellow of The Hemingway Society (USA) and was on the Steering Committee for the 1993 Guilin ELT/Hemingway International Conference in the People's Republic of China. Among his works in English are *The Code of Concord: Emerson's Search for Universal Laws; Gallery of Mirrors: Reflections of Swedenborgian Thought;* and *What is National Literature: Lectures on Emerson, Dostoevsky and Hemingway and the Meaning of Culture.*

The recognition of Hemingway as a major and representative writer of the United States of America, was a slow but explosive process. His emergence in the western canon was an even more adventurous voyage. His works were burnt in the bonfire in Berlin on May 10, 1933 as being a monument of modern decadence. That was a major proof of the writer's significance and a step toward world fame.

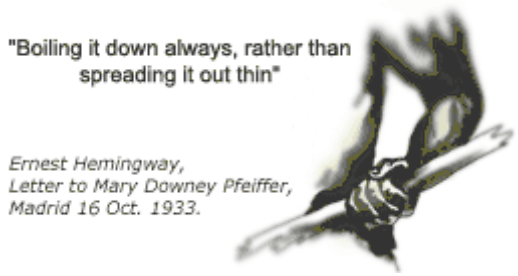
To read Hemingway has always produced strong reactions. When his parents received the first copies of their son's book *In Our Time* (1924), they read it with horror. Furious, his father sent the volumes back to the publisher, as he could not tolerate such filth in the house. Hemingway's apparently coarse, crude, vulgar and unsentimental style and manners appeared equally shocking to many people outside his family. On the other hand, this style was precisely the reason why a great many other people liked his work. A myth, exaggerating those features, was to be born.

Hemingway in Our Time

After he had committed suicide at Ketchum, Idaho, in 1961, the literary position of the 1954 Nobel Laureate changed significantly and has, in a way, even become stronger. This is partly due to several posthumous works and collections that show the author's versatility – *A Moveable Feast* (1964), *By-Line* (1967), *88 Poems* (1979), and *Selected Letters* (1981). It is also the result of painstaking and successful Hemingway research, in which The Hemingway Society (USA) has played an important role since 1980.

Another result of this enduring interest is that many new aspects of Hemingway's life and works that were previously obscured by his public image have now emerged into the light. On the other hand, posthumously published novels, such as *Islands in the Stream* (1970) and *The Garden of Eden* (1986), have disappointed many of the old Hemingway readers. However, rather than bearing witness to declining literary power, (which, considering the author's declining health would, indeed, be a rather trivial observation even if it were true) the late works confront us with a reappraisal and reconsideration of basic values. They also display an unbiased seeking and experimentation, as if the author was losing both his direction and his footing, or was becoming unrestrained in a new way. Just as modern Hemingway scholarship has added immensely to the depth of our understanding of Hemingway – making him more and more difficult to define! – these works reveal and stress a complexity that may cause bewilderment or relief, depending on what perspective one adopts.

The "hard-boiled" Style


"Boiling it down always, rather than spreading it out thin"
Ernest Hemingway,
Letter to Mary Downey Pfeiffer,
Madrid 16 Oct. 1933.

The slang word "hard-boiled", used to describe characters and works of art, was a product of twentieth century warfare. To be "hard-boiled" meant to be unfeeling, callous, cold-hearted, cynical, rough, obdurate, unemotional, without sentiment. Later to become a literary term, the word originated in American Army World War I training camps, and has been in common, colloquial usage since about 1930.

Contemporary literary criticism regarded Ernest Hemingway's works as marked by his use of this style, which was typical of the era. Indeed, in many respects they were regarded as the embodiment and symbol of hard-boiled literature.

However, neither Hemingway the man nor Hemingway the writer should be labeled "hard-boiled" – his style is the only aspect that deserves this epithet, and even that is ambiguous. Let us get down to basics, concentrate on one main feature in his literary style, and then turn to the alleged hard-boiled mind behind it, and his macho style of living and speaking.

A hard-boiled mind?

An unmatched introduction to Hemingway's particular skill as a writer is the beginning of *A Farewell to Arms,* certainly one of the most pregnant opening paragraphs in the history of the modern American novel. In that passage the power of concentration reaches a peak, forming a vivid and charged sequence, as if it were a 10-second video summary. It is packed with events and excitement, yet significantly frosty, as if unresponsive and numb, like a silent flashback dream sequence in which bygone images return, pass in review and fade away, leaving emptiness and quietude behind them. The lapidary writing approaches the highest style of poetry, vibrant with meaning and emotion, while the pace is maintained by the exclusion of any descriptive redundancy, of obtrusive punctuation, and of superfluous or narrowing emotive signs:

IN the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterwards the road bare and white except for the leaves.
At the end of the sixteenth chapter of *Death in the Afternoon* the author approaches a definition of the "hard-boiled" style:

"If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things."

Ezra Pound taught him "to distrust adjectives" (*A Moveable Feast*). That meant creating a style in accordance with the esthetics and ethics of raising the emotional temperature towards the level of universal truth by shutting the door on sentiment, on the subjective.

A macho style of living and speaking.

The Unwritten Code

Later biographic research revealed, behind the macho façade of boxing, bullfighting, big-game hunting and deep-sea fishing he built up, a sensitive and vulnerable mind that was full of contradictions.

In Hemingway, sentimentality, sympathy, and empathy are turned inwards, not restrained, but vibrant below and beyond the level of fact and fable. The reader feels their presence although they are not visible in the actual words. That is because of Hemingway's awareness of the relation between the truth of facts and events and his conviction that they produce corresponding emotions.

"Find what gave you the emotion; what the action was that gave you the excitement. Then write it down making it clear so the reader will see it too and have the same feeling as you had."

That was the essence of his style, to focus on facts. Hemingway aimed at "the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always" (*Death in the Afternoon*). In Hemingway, we see a reaction against Romantic turgidity and vagueness: back to basics, to the essentials. Thus his new realism in a new key resembles the old Puritan simplicity and discipline; both of them refrained from exhibiting the sentimental, the relative.

Hemingway's sincere and stern ambition was to approach Truth, clinging to an as yet unwritten code, a higher law which he referred to as "an absolute conscience as unchanging as the standard meter in Paris" (*Green Hills of Africa*, I: 1).

Hemingway's near-death Experience

Though Hemingway seems to have seen himself and life in general reflected in war, he himself never became reconciled to it. His mind was in a state of civil war, fighting demons inwardly as well as outwardly. In the long run defeat is as revealing and fundamental as victory: we are all losers, defeated by death. To live is the only way to face the ordeal, and the ultimate ordeal in our lives is the opposite of life. Hence

Hemingway's obsession with death. Deep sea fishing, bull-fighting, boxing, big-game hunting, war, – all are means of ritualizing the death struggle in his mind – it is very explicit in books such as *A Farewell to Arms* and *Death in the Afternoon,* which were based on his own experience.

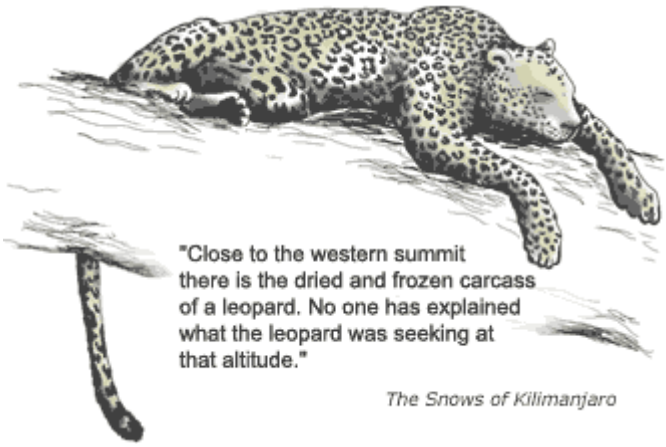
Escaping death during World War I.

Modern investigations into so-called Near-Death Experiences (NDE) such as those by Raymond Moody, Kenneth Ring and many others, have focused on a pattern of empirical knowledge gained on the threshold of death; a dream-like encounter with unknown border regions. There is a parallel in Hemingway's life, connected with the occasion when he was seriously wounded at midnight on July 8, 1918, at Fossalta di Piave in Italy and nearly died. He was the first American to be wounded in Italy during World War I. Here is a case of NDE in Hemingway, and I think that is of basic importance, pertinent to the understanding of all Hemingway's work. In *A Farewell to Arms,* an experience of this sort occurs to the ambulance driver Frederic Henry, Hemingway's alter ego, wounded in the leg by shellfire in Italy. (Concerning the highly autobiographical nature of *A Farewell to Arms,* see Michael S. Reynolds's documentary work *Hemingway's First War: The Making of A Farewell to Arms,* Princeton University Press 1976). As regards the NDE, we can note the incidental expression "to go out in a blaze of light" (letter to his family, Milan Oct. 18, 1918), and the long statement about what had occurred: Milan, July 21, 1918 (*Selected Letters,* ed. Carlos Baker, 1981).

Hemingway touched on that crucial experience in his life – what he had felt and thought – in the short story "Now I Lay Me" (1927):

"my soul would go out of my body … I had been blown up at night and felt it go out of me and go off and then come back"
– and again, briefly, in *In Our Time* in the lines on the death of Maera. It reappears, in another setting and form, in the image of immortality in the African story *The Snows of Kilimanjaro,* where the dying Harry knows he is going to the peak called "Ngàje Ngài", which means, as explained in Hemingway's introductory note, "the House of God".

The Coyote and the Leopard


"Close to the western summit
there is the dried and frozen carcass
of a leopard. No one has explained
what the leopard was seeking at
that altitude."
The Snows of Kilimanjaro

Hemingway's seeming insensitive detachment is only superficial, a compulsive avoidance of the emotional, but not of the emotionally tinged or charged. The pattern of his rigid, dispassionate compressed style of writing and way of life gives a picture of a touching Jeremiad of human tragedy. Hemingway's probe touches nerves, and they hurt. But through the web of failure and disillusion there emerges a picture of human greatness, of confidence even.

Hemingway was not the Nihilist he has often been called. As he belonged to the Protestant nay-saying tradition of American dissent, the spirit of the American Revolution, he denied the denial and acceded to the basic truth which he found in the human soul: the will to live, the will to persevere, to endure, to defy. The all-pervading sense of loss is, indirectly, affirmative. Hemingway's style is a compulsive suppression of unbearable and inexpressible feelings in the chaotic world of his times, where courage and independence offered a code of survival. Sentiments are suppressed to the boil.

The frontier mentality had become universal – the individual is on his own, like a Pilgrim walking into the unknown with neither shelter nor guidance, thrown upon his own resources, his strength and his judgment. Hemingway's style is the style of understatement since his hero is a hero of action, which is the human condition.

There is an illuminating text in William James (1842-1910) which is both significant and reminiscent, bridging the gap between Puritan moralism, its educational parables and exempla, and lost-generation turbulent heroism. In a letter written in Yosemite Valley to his son, Alexander, William James wrote:

"I saw a moving sight the other morning before breakfast in a little hotel where I slept in the dusty fields. The young man of the house had shot a little wolf called coyote in the early morning. The heroic little animal lay on the ground, with his big furry ears, and his clean white teeth, and his jolly cheerful little body, but his brave little life was gone. It made me think how brave all these living things are. Here little coyote was, without any clothes or house or books or anything, with nothing but his own naked self to pay his way with, and risking his life so cheerfully – and losing it – just to see if he could pick up a meal near the hotel. He was doing his coyote-business like a hero, and you must do your boy-business, and I my man-business bravely, too, or else we won't be worth as much as a little coyote." (*The Letters of William James,* ed. Henry James, Little, Brown and Co.: Boston 1926.)

The courageous coyote thus serves as a moral example, illustrating a philosophy of life which says that it is worth jeopardizing life itself to be true to one's own nature. That is precisely the point of the frozen leopard close to the western summit of Kilimanjaro in Hemingway's famous short story. That is the explanation of what the leopard was seeking at that altitude, and the answer was given time and again in the works of Ernest Hemingway.

Jeopardizing life itself to be true to one's own nature.

But what about the ugliness, then? What about all the evil, the crude, the rude, the rough, the vulgar aspects of his work, even the horror, which dismayed people? How could all that be compatible with moral standards? He justified the inclusion of such aspects in a letter to his "Dear Dad" in 1925:

"The reason I have not sent you any of my work is because you or Mother sent back the *In Our Time* books. That looked as though you did not want to see any. You see I am trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the actual life across – not to just depict life – or criticize it – but to actually make it alive. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience the thing. You can't do this without putting in the bad and the ugly as well as what is beautiful. Because if it is all beautiful you can't believe in it. Things aren't that way. It is only by showing both sides – 3 dimensions and if possible 4 that you can write the way I want to.

So, when you see anything of mine that you don't like remember that I'm sincere in doing it and that I'm working toward something. If I write an ugly story that might be hateful to you or to Mother the next one might be one that you would like exceedingly."

Hemingway Family Photo, 1909.

Merging Gender in Eden

Like many other of his works, *True at First Light* was a blend of autobiography and fiction in which the author identified with the first person narrator. The author, who never kept a journal or wrote an autobiography in his life, draws on experience for his realism, slightly transforming events in his life. In this sense, the posthumous novel *Islands in the Stream* is in some places neither fictional nor fictitious. *The Garden of Eden*, however, a book brimming with the author's vulnerability just as *A Farewell to Arms* is, treats intimate and delicate matters. It is a story told in the third person, as are all his major works. Thus we get to know the writer David Bourne, assuredly an explorer like Daniel Boone, on his adventurous Mediterranean honeymoon.

The anti-hero's wife in *The Garden of Eden,* Catherine Bourne, is one of the most persuasive and lively heroines in Hemingway's works. She is depicted with fascination and fear, like Marcel Proust's Albertine and, at least in name, she reminds us of the strong and attractive Catherine Barkley (alias the seven-year-older Agnes Von Kurowsky), the Red Cross heroine in *A Farewell to Arms.* The former character is much more complex and difficult to define, however, and her ardor and the fire of marital love prove consuming and transmogrifying.

Living at the Grau ("canal") du Roi, on the shores of the stream that runs from Aigues-Mortes straight down to the sea, the newly wedded couple in *The Garden of Eden* live in a borderland where "water" and "death" are key words, and where connotations like L'eau du Léthe present themselves: Eros and Thanatos, love and death, paradise and trespass.

In this innocent borderland, moral limits are immediately extended, and conventional roles are reversed. Sipping his post-coital fine à l'eau in the afternoon, David Bourne feels relieved of all the problems he had before his marriage, and has no thought of "writing nor anything but being with this girl," who absorbs him and assumes command. Then the blond, sun-tanned Catherine appears with her hair "cropped as short as a boy's," declaring:

"now I am a boy … You see why it's dangerous, don't you? … Why do we have to go by everyone else's rules? We're us … Please understand and love me … I am Peter … You're my beautiful lovely Catherine."
From that moment the tables are turned. David-Catherine accepts and submits, and Catherine-Peter takes over the man's role. She mounts him in bed at night, and penetrates him in conjugal bliss:

"He had shut his eyes and he could feel the long light weight of her on him … and then lay back in the dark and did not think at all and only felt the weight and the strangeness inside and she said: 'Now you can't tell who is who can you?"

Ernest Hemingway, 1901.

The Father in the Garden

Women with a gamin hairstyle, lovers who cut and dye their hair and change sexual roles, are themes that, with variations, occur in his novels from *A Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls,* to the posthumous *Islands in the Stream.* They culminate in *The Garden of Eden.* When writing *The Garden of Eden* he appeared as a redhead one day in May 1947. When asked about it, he said he had dyed his hair by mistake. In that novel, the search for complete unity between the lovers is carried to extremes. It may seem that the halves of the primordial Androgyne of the Platonic myth (once cut in two by Zeus and ever since longing to become a complete being again) are uniting here. Set in a fictional Paradise, a Biblical "Eden", the novel is perhaps even more a story about expulsion, the loss of innocence, and the ensuing liberation, about knowledge acquired through the Fall, which is the basis of culture, about the ordeals and the high price an author must pay to become a writer worthy of his salt. Against a mythical background, the voice of Hemingway's father is heard, challenging his son, as did the Father in the Biblical Garden. Slightly disguised, Hemingway's dear father, who haunted his son's life and work even after he had shot himself in 1928, remained an internalized critic until Ernest also took his life in 1961. Hemingway's père pressed his ambivalent son to surpass himself and produce a distinct and lively multidimensional text, – "3 dimensions and if possible 4":

"He found he knew much more about his father than when he had first written this story and he knew he could measure his progress by the small things which made his father more tactile and to have more dimensions than he had in the story before."

After they had committed honeymoon adultery with the girl both spouses equally love passionately, David exclaims: "We've been burned out … Crazy woman burned out the Bournes." This consuming and transforming fire of love and its subsequent trials and transgressions, in the end has a purging effect on the writer, who finally, as if emerging from a chrysalis stage, rises like the Phoenix from his bed and sits down in a regenerated mood to write in a perfect style:

"He got out his pencils and a new cahier, sharpened five pencils and began to write the story of his father and the raid in the year of the Maji-Maji rebellion … David wrote steadily and well and the sentences that he had made before came to him complete

and entire and he put them down, corrected them, and cut them as if he were going over proof. Not a sentence was missing … He wrote on a while longer now and there was no sign that any of it would ever cease returning to him intact."

Maji-Maji and Mau Mau

But why is Maji-Maji so important to the author when he has attained perfection?

When Tanzania gained independence in 1961-62, President Julius Nyerere proclaimed that the new republic was the fulfillment of the Maji-Maji dream. The Maji-Maji Rebellion had been a farmers' revolt against colonial rule in German East Africa in 1905-1907. It began in the hill country southwest of Dar es-Salaam and spread rapidly until the insurrection was finally crushed after some 70,000 Africans had been killed. The farmers challenged the German militia fearlessly, crying "Maji! Maji!" when they attacked, believing themselves to be protected from bullets and death by "magic water". Maji is Swahili for "water" – one of the key words in Hemingway's novel.

The conviction and purposefulness of the Maji-Maji in *The Garden of Eden,* corresponds to the Kenyan Mau-Mau context of the novel *True at First Light,* which Hemingway started writing after his East African safari in 1953. Mau Mau was an insurrection of Kikuyo farm laborers in 1952. It was led by Jomo Kenyatta, who was subsequently held in prison until he became the premier of Kenya in 1963 (and the first President of the Republic in 1964). For Kikuyo men or women (and there were several women in the movement), to join Mau Mau meant dedicating their lives to a cause and sacrificing everything else, it meant taking a sacred oath that definitely cut them off from decorum and ordinary life.
In Hemingway's vision, Maji-Maji and Mau Mau blend with his notion of the ideal committed writer, a man who is prepared to die for his art, and for art's sake.

In the private library of Dag Hammarskjöld, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize after his death in the Congo (Africa) in 1961, the year Hemingway died, a copy of the beautiful original edition of *A Farewell to Arms* (Charles Scribner´s Sons, 1929) may still be seen (now in the Royal Library, Stockholm). In a way it is significant that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who was dedicated to peace making, should have been a Hemingway reader.

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Hemingway's Oak Park

{https://www.hemingwaybirthplace.com/hemingway-and-oak-park}

The foundation for Ernest Hemingway's life and work can be found in Oak Park, Ill. His first 20 years in this Chicago suburb, with prairies and woods to the west, prepared him for his life as a writer. His father taught him about the outdoors and to observe nature closely. His mother took him to opera houses and museums in Chicago so he could appreciate the inner life the arts awakened. Hemingway's family initiated him in the spiritual life of their church where he sang in the choir and reflected on sermons.

It was in Oak Park that Hemingway received his only formal education. In school, Ernest keenly observed what was around him and within him to make stories real for his readers. He wrote most convincingly about people, places and events he witnessed firsthand. When Ernest left Oak Park, he would continue to write from his own experiences on four continents, seeking to convey to readers "how it was." His writing touched what was common in all people's lives.

In 1954, he was recognized with the Nobel Prize for "The Old Man and The Sea" — a novella that reflects his "powerful, style-making mastery of the art of modern narration." Decades after Hemingway's death in 1961, people around the world recall his adventures and new generations of readers find fresh meaning in his stories.

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AmericanLiterature.Com

https://americanliterature.com/author/ernest-hemingway

Ernest Hemingway (1899 - 1961) was an iconic American journalist and author, known for his brief and straightforward style of writing and for the gusto with which he lived his life. To illlustrate the point, legend has it that Hemingway bet a group of fellow writers he could write a meaningful story in just six words, and he won the bet with this line: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn."

Hemingway participated in World War I as an ambulance driver until he was injured; then again during World War II. He served as a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War; survived car accidents and plane crashes as well as mishaps on hunting and fishing expeditions. And if that wasn't enough danger for one man, he crowned it with an exclamation point by marrying four times; Hadley Richardson (1921-1927), Pauline Pfeiffer (1927-1940), Martha Gellhorn (1940-1945) and Mary Welsh (1946-1961). His experiences in war led him to abandon abstract language as empty, in favor of his hallmark writing style, in which he savored simplified and concrete actions. As if it were so easy: *"There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed."*

He is best known for his novels; most readers are familiar with ***The Sun Also Rises*** (1926), ***A Farewell to Arms*** (1929), ***For Whom the Bell Tolls*** (1940), and ***The Old Man and the Sea*** (1952). Though there were strong critics of his work -- particularly his unflattering portrayal of female characters -- he received the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954 for ***The Old Man and the Sea***. We feature Hemingway in Pulitzer Prize Winners.

Many of Hemingway's novels are not yet in the public domain, but many of his short stories are, including The Snows of Kilimanjaro and his story collection, In Our Time. Considered one of the finest authors of "the Lost Generation" who experienced both world wars and the Spanish War.

Visit American History for other important figures and writing which helped shape the country.

"All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since."

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PBS.Org

{https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/hemingway}

Hemingway | Watch All Episodes

Behind the Scenes | Making Hemingway

Ken Burns, Lynn Novick and Sarah Botstein give us a behind-the-scenes look at the production of Hemingway. We explore where Ernest Hemingway lived and travelled as the team visits his home in Cuba, learn about his writing process through manuscripts housed at the JFK Library, and the impact of fame on his art. Premieres April 5, 2021.

About the Film

Hemingway, a three-part, six-hour documentary film by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, examines the visionary work and the turbulent life of Ernest Hemingway, one of the greatest and most influential writers America has ever produced. Interweaving his eventful biography — a life lived at the ultimately treacherous nexus of art, fame, and celebrity — with carefully selected excerpts from his iconic short stories, novels, and non-fiction, the series reveals the brilliant, ambitious, charismatic, and complicated man behind the myth, and the art he created.

Note: Kindly visit the cited Web Page to view all Episodes

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His Legacy

{https://www.ernesthemingwayofficial.com}

HEMINGWAY BIRTHPLACE

Ernest Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899, in a Queen Anne-style home at 339 North Oak Park Avenue in Oak Park, Illinois. Built in 1890 by his maternal grandparents, the house was among the first in the area to have electricity. Hemingway spent the first six years of his life here before the family moved nearby. In 1992, the Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park purchased and meticulously restored the home to its original Victorian-era condition. Today, it operates as the Ernest Hemingway Birthplace Museum, offering visitors guided tours that explore the author's early life and family influences.

HEMINGWAY HOME

The Hemingway House in Key West, Florida, is a historic landmark and former residence of famed author Ernest Hemingway. Built in 1851 in the Spanish Colonial style, the house became Hemingway's home in the 1930s. Here, he wrote some of his most famous works, including To Have and Have Not. The lush property is also known for its population of polydactyl (six-toed) cats, many descended from Hemingway's own pet. Today, the house operates as a museum, offering visitors a glimpse into the writer's life and legacy. Its tropical gardens, preserved interiors, and literary history make it a beloved cultural destination.

FINCA LA VIGÍA

The Hemingway Home in Cuba, known as Finca Vigía ("Lookout Farm"), is located in San Francisco de Paula, just outside Havana. Ernest Hemingway lived there for nearly 20 years, from 1939 to 1960, and wrote some of his most significant works, including The Old Man and the Sea and A Moveable Feast. The home, preserved as a museum, remains much as Hemingway left it—filled with books, hunting trophies, and personal artifacts. The property includes a tower study, his fishing boat

Pilar, and expansive gardens. Finca Vigía offers a deep insight into Hemingway's Cuban life and enduring literary legacy.

HEMINGWAY HOUSE AND PRESERVE

Ernest Hemingway's final residence is located in Ketchum, Idaho, near Sun Valley. He purchased the two-story, 2,500-square-foot home in 1959, situated west of the Big Wood River. Constructed in 1953, the house features concrete walls designed to resemble wood. Hemingway lived there until his death in 1961. The property was bequeathed to The Nature Conservancy by his widow, Mary, in 1986 and later transferred to The Community Library in Ketchum. Now managed as a private residence for visiting writers, the home is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

JFK LIBRARY

The Ernest Hemingway Collection at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston is the world's principal repository of the author's manuscripts and personal papers. Donated by his widow, Mary Hemingway, the collection encompasses over 1,000 manuscript items—including drafts of The Sun Also Rises and 44 endings to A Farewell to Arms—and more than 10,000 photographs. It also features Hemingway's correspondence with notable figures like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Marlene Dietrich. Established through the efforts of Mary Hemingway and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, the archive offers unparalleled insights into Hemingway's life and work.

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The Hemingway Society

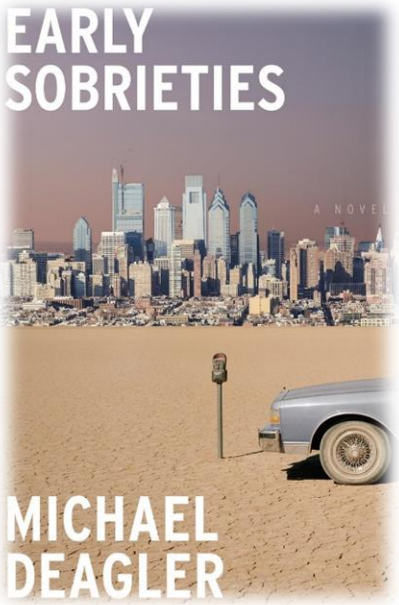
{https://www.hemingwaysociety.org/list-penhemingway-winners}

PEN/Hemingway Award

The PEN/Hemingway Award is supported by the Hemingway Foundation and Society, the PEN/Faulkner Foundation, the Hemingway Family, the Ucross Foundation, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, and the Friends of the Ernest Hemingway Collection.

List of Winners

2025 PEN/HEMINGWAY AWARD WINNER



***Early Sobrieties*, Michael Deagler (Astra House)**

NOTE:
For the complete list of WINNERS [from 1976 to 2024], visit the cited Web Page.

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Videos

[01] Ernest Hemingway - The Later Years <::> Documentary
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ovlqo6yXrwo [45:23]
Ernest Hemingway is almost as famous for his lifestyle as his writing. Mixing with a wealthy and glamorous set, he indulged his passions for hunting and fishing and was always launching himself into something new.
He didn't have an easy start in life with an overbearing father and distinctly odd mother and a heavy genetic loading for mental instability.
But he redefined the boundaries of fiction with his unique writing style and challenging themes. From the cafes of Paris to the savannas of Africa, the life he lived was like the characters he created: full throttle, flawed, but always fascinating.
Part Two of this biographical documentary explores the second half of his life - his Spanish Civil War experiences , his spying activities, his involvement in the Second World War, his relationship with wives number three and four and the illness that ultimately cost him his life.
He was one of most complex personalities of the 20th century, a man of great sensitivity and profound insights, but a man full of contradictions who could also be infuriatingly selfish and bitter. A man full of life and enthusiasm who tried so hard to exorcise the

demons of his youth but who was tragically unable to escape his genetic inheritance.

[02] A chat with Ernest Hemingway

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-nCIKbM1dc [30:42]

[03] Ranking Ernest Hemingway's Books

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6jNyqIhH7Y [25:13]

[04] Finally an Honest Video on Ernest Hemingway <::> Biography

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Cmo327qwmk [38:29]

I've long been wanting to dip into more contemporary history. I know we started this channel with mythology, and eventually started covering ancient history, but my goal has always been to tell stories... and what better story to tell than that of one of history's greatest story writers? I think an Ernest Hemingway is a good way to kick off a new wave of content on this channel — that wave being the aforementioned contemporary history. Ernest Hemingway's life is fascinating, and I hope I put it together in a way that differs from the many videos that already cover his life. I feel like this is a complete version that shows both his greatness and darkness... an honest video on Ernest Hemingway.

[05] Ernest Hemingway life and works with important Questions

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KYPNbv95Lk [38:12]

[06] Write Like Ernest Hemingway! Let's Practice!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVo-9BSzegQ [34:07]

[07] Hemingway the Author

https://www.pbs.org/video/hemingway-the-author-zxoery/[1:07:21]

[08] Ernest Hemingway > The Early Years <:> Biographical Documentary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urhwJbCXgEA [30:22]

Ernest Hemingway is almost as famous for his lifestyle as his writing. Mixing with a wealthy and glamorous set, he indulged his passions for hunting and fishing and was always throwing himself into something new.

He didn't have an easy start in life with an overbearing father and distinctly odd mother and a heavy genetic loading for mental instability.

But he redefined the boundaries of fiction with his unique writing style and challenging themes. From the cafes of Paris to the savannas of Africa, the life he lived was like the characters he created: full throttle, flawed, but always fascinating.

Part One of this biographical documentary explores the life of Ernest Hemingway, to uncover the man behind the myths - his bravery and vulnerability, his bullishness and sensitivity, his determination to be in control of his destiny and avoid the fate of his father…and his sad final year.

[09] What Ernest Hemingway Sacrificed To Become a Great Author

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5SRqRotR-A [27:40]

[10] Ernest Hemingway Biography: A Life of Love and Loss

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLTk727FGuA [19:26]

During his early years the future macho man's mother dressed and treated him as a girl and his own son Gregory, would become a transvestite. He was known as Papa Hemingway and yet he had a distant relationship with his three sons. In the midst of the

glowing tributes that the world heaped upon him he sunk to terrible lows, causing turmoil as he racked up awards. And then finally, in an act of desperation, he took his own life.

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QUOTES

- There is no hunting like the hunting of man, and those who have hunted armed men long enough and liked it, never care for anything else thereafter.
- The way to make people trust-worthy is to trust them.
- When people talk listen completely. Don't be thinking what you're going to say. Most people never listen.
- The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places.
- Forget your personal tragedy. We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it—don't cheat with it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist—but don't think anything is of any importance because it happens to you or anyone belonging to you.
- There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow men. True nobility lies in being superior to your former self.
- The best people possess a feeling for beauty, the courage to take risks, the discipline to tell the truth, the capacity for sacrifice. Ironically, their virtues make them vulnerable; they are often wounded, sometimes destroyed.
- Try to learn to breathe deeply, really to taste food when you eat, and when you sleep, really to sleep. Try as much as possible to be wholly alive with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell. And when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough.

Note: Kindly also, visit these Web Pages for MORE Quotations!

01] https://www.penguin.co.uk/discover/articles/12-best-ernest-hemingway-quotes
02] https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1455.Ernest_Hemingway
03] https://www.azquotes.com/author/6539-Ernest_Hemingway
04] https://www.britannica.com/quotes/Ernest-Hemingway

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27 Feb 1902

20 Dec 1968

John Steinbeck

Nobel Prize in Literature 1962

Born: 27 February 1902, Salinas, CA, USA
Died: 20 December 1968, New York, NY, USA
Residence at the time of the award: USA
Prize motivation:

"for his realistic and imaginative writings, combining
as they do sympathetic humour
and keen social perception"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1962/steinbeck/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize in

- Literature 1943, by Sigfrid Siwertz
- Literature 1944, by Erik Lönnroth
- Literature 1945, by Gustaf Munthe
- Literature 1949, by Henri Maurice Peyre
- Literature 1958, by Lennox Grey
- Literature 1959, by E Vinaver
- Literature 1960, by Henry Olsson
- Literature 1961, by The Danish PEN-Club
- Literature 1961, by E Vinaver
- Literature 1962, by Eyvind Johnson
- Literature 1962, by The Danish PEN-Club

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Links to other sites

[01] On John Steinbeck from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] Steinbeck Center at San José State University

Award Ceremony 1962 <::> Video

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1962/award-video/

The 1962 Nobel Prizes were delivered on 10 December 1962, in a glittering ceremony at the Stockholm Concert Hall, to four British scientists, an American professor and an American novelist. The 80-year old Swedish King Gustaf VI Adolf presented each recipient with a Nobel Medal and Diploma: for Chemistry to Max F. Perutz and John C. Kendrew; for Physiology or Medicine to Francis Crick, James Watson and Maurice Wilkins; and for Literature to John Steinbeck.

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Questions and Answers

Question: *When was John Steinbeck born?*

Answer: John Ernst Steinbeck was born on 27 February 1902, in Salinas, California, United States.

Question: *What was John Steinbeck's family background?*

Answer: His father, John Ernst Steinbeck, was a county treasurer and his mother, Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, was a teacher. He had two elder sisters, Esther and Elizabeth, and one younger sister, Mary.

Question: *Did John Steinbeck marry and have children?*

Answer: He was married to Carol Henning between 1930 and 1942. Steinbeck was married to his second wife, Gwyndolyn Conger, between 1943 and 1948, during which time he had two sons, Thomas (born 1944) and John (born 1946). He was married to his third wife Elaine Anderson Scott from 1950 until his death.

Question: *What was his educational background?*

Answer: He graduated from the Salinas High School, Salinas in 1919. He attended Stanford University intermittently from 1919 to 1925 but he never earned a degree.

Question: *What is his works generally about?*

Answer: His works generally deal with the social and economic issues of rural America.

Question: *When did John Steinbeck receive the Nobel Prize?*

Answer: John Steinbeck received the Nobel Medal and Diploma on 10 December 1962 from the Swedish King Gustaf VI Adolf, at the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony held at the Stockholm Concert Hall. The Nobel Medal was donated by the Steinbeck family to the Stanford University Library in 2005.

Question: *Was John Steinbeck awarded the Nobel Prize for one particular novel or for several?*

Answer: John Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature "for his realistic and imaginative writings, combining as they do sympathetic humour and keen social perception".

Question: *What were John Steinbeck's major works?*

Answer: Arguably Steinbeck's best-known works are *East of Eden*, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. *East of Eden* follows the intertwined lives and times of two families, the Trasks and the Hamiltons, from the American Civil War to World War I. *Of Mice and Men* is a story about two travelling ranch workers, George and Lennie, who are trying to earn enough money to buy their own farm. *The Grapes of Wrath,* considered by many to be his finest work, tells the story of Oklahoma tenant farmers who, unable to earn a living from the land, move to California where they became migratory workers.

Question: *When did John Steinbeck die and where is he buried?*

Answer: John Steinbeck died of heart failure on 20 December 1968, in New York, N.Y, United States. On 4 March 1969, his ashes were buried in the Garden of Memories cemetery in Salinas in the Hamilton Family plot.

Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Anders Österling, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy

John Steinbeck, the author awarded this year's Nobel Prize in Literature, was born in the little town of Salinas, California, a few miles from the Pacific coast near the fertile Salinas Valley. This locality forms the background for many of his descriptions of the common man's everyday life. He was raised in moderate circumstances, yet he was on equal terms with the workers' families in this rather diversified area. While studying at Stanford University, he often had to earn his living by working on the ranches. He left Stanford without graduating and, in 1925, went to New York as a freelance writer. After bitter years of struggling to exist, he returned to California, where he found a home in a lonely cottage by the sea. There he continued his writing.

Although he had already written several books by 1935, he achieved his first popular success in that year with *Tortilla Flat.* He offered his readers spicy and comic tales about a gang of *paisanos*, asocial individuals who, in their wild revels, are almost caricatures of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table. It has been said that in the United States this book came as a welcome antidote to the gloom of the then prevailing depression. The laugh was now on Steinbeck's side. But he had no mind to be an unoffending comforter and entertainer. The topics he chose were serious and denunciatory, as for example the bitter strikes on California's fruit and cotton plantations which he depicted in his novel *In Dubious Battle* (1936). The power of his literary style increased steadily during these years. The little masterpiece *Of Mice and Men* (1937), which is the story of

Lennie, the imbecile giant who, out of tenderness, alone squeezes the life out of every living creature that comes into his hands, was followed by those incomparable short stories which he collected in the volume *The Long Valley* (1938). The way had now been paved for the great work that is principally associated with Steinbeck's name, the epic chronicle *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). This is the story of the emigration to California which was forced upon a group of people from Oklahoma through unemployment and abuse of power. This tragic episode in the social history of the United States inspired in Steinbeck a poignant description of the experiences of one particular farmer and his family during their endless, heartbreaking journey to a new home.

In this brief presentation it is not possible to dwell at any length on individual works which Steinbeck later produced. If at times the critics have seemed to note certain signs of flagging powers, of repetitions that might point to a decrease in vitality, Steinbeck belied their fears most emphatically with *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), a novel published last year. Here he attained the same standard which he set in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Again he holds his position as an independent expounder of the truth with an unbiased instinct for what is genuinely American, be it good or bad.

In this recent novel, the central figure is the head of a family who has come down in the world. After serving in the war, he fails at whatever he tries until at last he is employed in the simple work of a grocery store clerk in the New England town of his forefathers. He is an honest man and he does not complain without due cause, although he is constantly exposed to temptation when he sees the means by which material success must be purchased. However, such means require both hard scrupulousness and moral obduracy, qualities he cannot muster without risking his personal integrity. Tellingly displayed in his sensitive conscience, irradiated like a prism, is a whole body of questions which bear on the nation's welfare problems. This is done without any theorizing, using concrete, or even trivial, everyday situation, which are nonetheless convincing when described with all of Steinbeck's vigorous and realistic verve. Even with his insistence on the factual, there are harmonic tones of daydreaming, fumbling speculations around the eternal theme of life and death.

Steinbeck's latest book is an account of his experiences during a three-month tour of forty American states *Travels with Charley,* (1962). He travelled in a small truck equipped with a cabin where he slept and kept his stores. He travelled incognito, his only companion being a black poodle. We see here what a very experienced observer and *raisonneur* he is. In a series of admirable explorations into local colour, he rediscovers his country and its people. In its informal way this book is also a forceful criticism of society. The traveller in Rosinante – the name which he gave his truck – shows a slight tendency to praise the old at the expense of the new, even though it is quite obvious that he is on guard against the temptation. "I wonder why progress so often looks like destruction", he says in one place when he sees the bulldozers flattening out the verdant forest of Seattle to make room for the feverishly expanding residential areas and the skyscrapers. It is, in any case, a most topical reflection, valid also outside America.

Among the masters of modern American literature who have already been awarded this Prize – from Sinclair Lewis to Ernest Hemingway – Steinbeck more than holds his own, independent in position and achievement. There is in him a strain of grim humour which, to some extent, redeems his often cruel and crude motif. His sympathies always go out to the oppressed, to the misfits and the distressed; he likes to contrast the simple joy of life with the brutal and cynical craving for money. But in him we find the American temperament also in his great feeling for nature, for the tilled soil, the wasteland, the mountains, and the ocean coasts, all an inexhaustible source of inspiration to Steinbeck in the midst of, and beyond, the world of human beings.

The Swedish Academy's reason for awarding the prize to John Steinbeck reads, "for his realistic as well as imaginative writings, distinguished by a sympathetic humour and a keen social perception."

Dear Mr. Steinbeck – You are not a stranger to the Swedish public any more than to that of your own country and of the whole world. With your most distinctive works you have become a teacher of good will and charity, a defender of human values, which can well be said to correspond to the proper idea of the Nobel Prize. In expressing the congratulations of the Swedish Academy, I now ask you to receive this year's Nobel Prize in Literature from the hands of His Majesty, the King.

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Prize Presentation

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1962/steinbeck/prize-presentation/

Watch a video clip of the 1962 Nobel Laureate in Literature, John Steinbeck, receiving his Nobel Prize medal and diploma during the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony at the Concert Hall in Stockholm, Sweden, on 10 December 1962.

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Banquet Speech

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1962/steinbeck/speech/}

John Steinbeck's speech at the Nobel Banquet in the Stockholm City Hall, 10 December 1962.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Min Vackra Fru, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I thank the Swedish Academy for finding my work worthy of this highest honor. In my heart there may be doubt that I deserve the Nobel award over other men of letters whom I hold in respect and reverence – but there is no question of my pleasure and pride in having it for myself.

It is customary for the recipient of this award to offer personal or scholarly comment on the nature and the direction of literature. At this particular time, however, I think it would be well to consider the high duties and the responsibilities of the makers of literature.

Such is the prestige of the Nobel award and of this place where I stand that I am impelled, not to squeak like a grateful and apologetic mouse, but to roar like a lion out of pride in my profession and in the great and good men who have practiced it through the ages.

Literature was not promulgated by a pale and emasculated critical priesthood singing their litanies in empty churches – nor is it a game for the cloistered elect, the tinhorn mendicants of low calorie despair.

Literature is as old as speech. It grew out of human need for it, and it has not changed except to become more needed.

The skalds, the bards, the writers are not separate and exclusive. From the beginning, their functions, their duties, their responsibilities have been decreed by our species.

Humanity has been passing through a gray and desolate time of confusion. My great predecessor, William Faulkner, speaking here, referred to it as a tragedy of universal fear so long sustained that there were no longer problems of the spirit, so that only the human heart in conflict with itself seemed worth writing about.
Faulkner, more than most men, was aware of human strength as well as of human weakness. He knew that the understanding and the resolution of fear are a large part of the writer's reason for being.

This is not new. The ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement.

Furthermore, the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit – for gallantry in defeat – for courage, compassion and love.

In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally-flags of hope and of emulation.

I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man, has no dedication nor any membership in literature.

The present universal fear has been the result of a forward surge in our knowledge and manipulation of certain dangerous factors in the physical world.

It is true that other phases of understanding have not yet caught up with this great step, but there is no reason to presume that they cannot or will not draw abreast. Indeed it is a part of the writer's responsibility to make sure that they do.

With humanity's long proud history of standing firm against natural enemies, sometimes in the face of almost certain defeat and extinction, we would be cowardly and stupid to leave the field on the eve of our greatest potential victory.

Understandably, I have been reading the life of Alfred Nobel – a solitary man, the books say, a thoughtful man. He perfected the release of explosive forces, capable of creative good or of destructive evil, but lacking choice, ungoverned by conscience or judgment.

Nobel saw some of the cruel and bloody misuses of his inventions. He may even have foreseen the end result of his probing – access to ultimate violence – to final destruction. Some say that he became cynical, but I do not believe this. I think he strove to invent a control, a safety valve. I think he found it finally only in the human mind and the human spirit. To me, his thinking is clearly indicated in the categories of these awards.

They are offered for increased and continuing knowledge of man and of his world – for understanding and communication, which are the functions of literature. And they are offered for demonstrations of the capacity for peace – the culmination of all the others.

Less than fifty years after his death, the door of nature was unlocked and we were offered the dreadful burden of choice.

We have usurped many of the powers we once ascribed to God.

Fearful and unprepared, we have assumed lordship over the life or death of the whole world – of all living things.

The danger and the glory and the choice rest finally in man. The test of his perfectibility is at hand.

Having taken Godlike power, we must seek in ourselves for the responsibility and the wisdom we once prayed some deity might have.

Man himself has become our greatest hazard and our only hope.

So that today, St. John the apostle may well be paraphrased …

In the end is the Word, and the Word is Man – and the Word is with Men.

Prior to the speech, R. Sandler,
Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, commented,

«Mr. John Steinbeck – In your writings, crowned with popular success in many countries, you have been a bold observer of human behaviour in both tragic and comic situations. This you have described to the reading public of the entire world with vigour and realism. Your *Travels with Charley* is not only a search for but also a revelation of America, as you yourself say: ‹This monster of a land, this mightiest of nations, this spawn of the future turns out to be the macrocosm of microcosm me.› Thanks to your instinct for what is genuinely American you stand out as a true representative of American life.»

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Kindly also visit the Web Page [Click HERE]

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Videos

[01] John Steinbeck - Flawed Genius <::> Biographical Documentary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6br2XQoqRw [42:45]

In his writing John Steinbeck was a champion of the downtrodden, the overworked and underpaid and those who were just unlucky - a man of high principles and a fierce critic of men who used their power in heavy-handed ways.

But in his personal life, he was very different – selfish, blunt to the point of rudeness, a hard-drinker with a distinct mean streak.

A complicated and contradictory man who could be incensed by injustice yet be surly, self-obsessed and chillingly inconsiderate with his own family.

In this biographical documentary, Prof Graeme Yorston, explores the multifaceted life of one of America's greatest writers, John Steinbeck, from his perspective as a psychiatrist.

To get beneath the surface and understand both the motivations for his writing and the drivers of his less praiseworthy behaviour.

[02] How to Read East of Eden by John Steinbeck

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wInPyOO0KB8 [1:03:24]

[03] Lunch with America's Leading Steinbeck Scholar

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VB9yc3uJzI [50:48]

Clay and his friend Russ Eagle interview Robert DeMott, one of the greatest living Steinbeck scholars, at his fishing cabin on the Madison River, south of Bozeman, Montana. DeMott is the author of three important studies of Steinbeck's novels, the editor of the journal he kept while writing his classic, The Grapes of Wrath, and also the editor of the four-volume Library of America edition of Steinbeck's work. Russ Eagle has been enamored of Steinbeck for decades, particularly his 1945 novella Cannery Row. Dr. DeMott was incredibly generous with his time and his insights into Steinbeck. An avid fly fisherman, DeMott spends five or six weeks each summer in Montana's Madison River valley, where we met up with him. DeMott regards the Grapes of Wrath as a top-five American novel, and Cannery Row, though underappreciated, is nearly as great. Over sodas and sandwiches, we had the honor of listening to one of America's most significant literary critics. This episode was recorded on August 1, 2025.

[04] East of Eden by John Steinbeck

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5C2R1pS4Us [1:03:01]

NO RE-READING REQUIRED! PLUS!! SPECIAL GUEST STAR: JOHN STEINBECK!! Tune in to hear all the ways in which this 1952 classic surprised Kimberly. Its insanely great sense of place, its lessons in history, its denigration/elevation of women, its biblical underpinnings...Kimberly's list of its attributes could go on and on. Whether EAST OF EDEN is your favorite of all time, or whether you have only hazy ninth-grade memories of Lenny from OF MICE AND MEN--tune in to hear why Steinbeck really deserved that Nobel Prize.

[05] The Pearl by John Steinbeck (Full Movie)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUSf9M0PZ8g [1:17:29]

[06] The Forgotten Village (Docutainment, 1941) Burgess Meredith & John Steinbeck

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kub1NlcHmdk [1:05:05]

Documentary examining the conflicts between the coming of modernization and the traditional culture of a small Mexican village.

[07] The Red Pony BOOK VS MOVIE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc8kG_kPexI [1:00:27]

Today my mom and I discuss John Steinbeck's The Red Pony! My mom lives in the Salinas valley and volunteers at The Steinbeck House! We discuss the four short stories that comprise The Red Pony, and then discuss the movie and how it compares!

[08] The Pearl by John Steinbeck full video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pya3UbuanyI [1:55:00]

[09] The Moon Is Down (1943) | Classic WWII Drama | John Steinbeck's Masterpiece

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcuqjm96jjg [1:30:25]

The Moon Is Down is a 1943 American war film starring Cedric Hardwicke, Lee J. Cobb, and Henry Travers, directed by Irving Pichel. The screenplay, written by Nunnally Johnson, is based on John Steinbeck's 1942 novel of the same name. This film marks Dorris Bowdon's final screen appearance and Natalie Wood's debut. It also features an uncredited performance by John Banner, who would later become famous for his role as Sgt. Schultz in the TV comedy series Hogan's Heroes.

Plot

During World War II, German soldiers occupy a small Norwegian town, compelling the citizens to work in the mines for the German war effort. The Allies support the growing resistance movement by air-dropping canisters filled with explosives, weapons, ammunition, and even chocolate. The German soldiers are baffled by the locals' resentment. As the resistance intensifies, several German soldiers are killed or wounded, and the townspeople suffer severe repercussions for their defiance. **Production**

The film was shot at Brent's Crags, California, the same location used for How Green Was My Valley a year earlier. Filming commenced on November 18, 1942, and concluded on January 14, 1943. Editing of the 16mm film was expedited to ensure its world premiere in Toronto, Canada, on March 13, 1943. The American premiere followed on March 26,

with the official release date on April 9, 1943. Twentieth Century Fox paid $300,000 for the movie rights, a record sum at the time.

Reception

Bosley Crowther, the film reviewer for The New York Times, offered a mixed verdict on The Moon Is Down. He praised screenwriter Nunnally Johnson for creating a "clear and incisive screen version" of the book, resulting in "a picture which is the finest on captured Norway yet and a powerful expression of faith in the enduring qualities of a people whose hearts are strong." He also commended "Irving Pichel's superlative direction and a generally excellent cast." However, Crowther noted that "the intellectual nature of this picture—its very clear and dispassionate reasoning—drains it of much of the emotion that one expects in such a story at this time." **The film was named one of the ten best films of the year by the National Board of Review.**

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The Steinbeck Institute

{https://steinbeck.stanford.edu/writer}

John Steinbeck was born in the farming town of Salinas, California on 27 February 1902. His father, John Ernst Steinbeck, was not a terribly successful man; at one time or another he was the manager of a Sperry flour plant, the owner of a feed and grain store, the treasurer of Monterey County. His mother, the strong-willed Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, was a former teacher. As a child growing up in the fertile Salinas Valley — called the "Salad Bowl of the Nation" — Steinbeck formed a deep appreciation of his environment, not only the rich fields and hills surrounding Salinas, but also the nearby Pacific coast where his family spent summer weekends. "I remember my childhood names for grasses and secret flowers," he wrote in the opening chapter of East of Eden. "I remember where a toad may live and what time the birds awaken in the summer-and what trees and seasons smelled like."

The observant, shy but often mischievous only son had, for the most part, a happy childhood growing up with two older sisters, Beth and Esther, and a much-adored younger sister, Mary. Never wealthy, the family was nonetheless prominent in the small town of 3,000, for both parents engaged in community activities. Mr. Steinbeck was a Mason, Mrs. Steinbeck a member of the Order of the Eastern Star and founder of The Wanderers, a women's club that traveled vicariously through monthly reports. While the elder Steinbecks established their identities by sending roots deep in the community, their son was something of a rebel. Respectable Salinas circumscribed the restless and imaginative young John Steinbeck and he defined himself against "Salinas thinking." At age fourteen he decided to be a writer and spent hours as a teenager living in a world of his own making, writing stories and poems in his upstairs bedroom. To please his parents he enrolled at Stanford University in 1919; to please himself he signed on only for those courses that interested him: classical and British literature, writing courses, and a smattering of science. The President of the English Club said that Steinbeck, who regularly attended meetings to read his stories aloud, "had no other interests or talents that I could make out. He was a writer, but he was that and nothing else" (Benson 69). Writing was, indeed, his passion, not only during the Stanford years but throughout his life. From 1919 to 1925, when he finally left Stanford without taking a degree, Steinbeck dropped in and out of the University, sometimes

to work closely with migrants and bindlestiffs on California ranches. Those relationships, coupled with an early sympathy for the weak and defenseless, deepened his empathy for workers, the disenfranchised, the lonely and dislocated, an empathy that is characteristic in his work.

After leaving Stanford, he briefly tried construction work and newspaper reporting in New York City, and then returned to his native state in order to hone his craft. In the late 1920s, during a three-year stint as a caretaker for a Lake Tahoe estate, he wrote several drafts of his first novel, Cup of Gold (1929) about the pirate Henry Morgan, and met the woman who would become his first wife, Carol Henning, a San Jose native. After their marriage in 1930, he and Carol settled, rent-free, into the Steinbeck family's summer cottage in Pacific Grove, she to search for jobs to support them, he to continue writing. During the decade of the 1930s Steinbeck wrote most of his best California fiction: The Pastures of Heaven (1932), To a God Unknown (1933), The Long Valley (1938), Tortilla Flat (1935), In Dubious Battle (1936), Of Mice and Men (1937) and The Grapes of Wrath (1939).

To a God Unknown, second written and third published, tells of patriarch Joseph Wayne's domination of and obsession with the land. Mystical and powerful, the novel testifies to Steinbeck's awareness of an essential bond between humans and the environments they inhabit. In a journal entry kept while working on this novel - a practice he continued all his life — the young author wrote: "the trees and the muscled mountains are the world — but not the world apart from man — the world and man — the one inseparable unit man and his environment. Why they should ever have been understood as being separate I do not know." His conviction that characters must be seen in the context of their environments remained constant throughout his career. His was not a man-dominated universe, but an interrelated whole, where species and the environment were seen to interact, where commensal bonds between people, among families, with nature were acknowledged. By 1933, Steinbeck had found his terrain; had chiseled a prose style that was more naturalistic, and far less strained than in his earliest novels; and had claimed his people - not the respectable, smug Salinas burghers, but those on the edges of polite society. Steinbeck's California fiction, from To a God Unknown to East of Eden (1952) envisions the dreams and defeats of common people shaped by the environments they inhabit. Undoubtedly his ecological, holistic vision was determined both by his early years roaming the Salinas hills and by his long and deep friendship with the remarkable Edward Flanders Ricketts, a marine biologist. Founder of Pacific Biological Laboratories, a marine lab eventually housed on Cannery Row in Monterey, Ed was a careful observer of inter-tidal life: "I grew to depend on his knowledge and on his patience in research," Steinbeck writes in "About Ed Ricketts," an essay composed after his friend's death in 1948 and published with The Log from the Sea of Cortez (1951). Ed Ricketts's influence on Steinbeck, however, struck far deeper than the common chord of detached observation. Ed was a lover of Gregorian chants and Bach; Spengler and Krishnamurti; Whitman and Li Po. His mind "knew no horizons," writes Steinbeck. In addition, Ricketts was remarkable for a quality of acceptance; he accepted people as they were and he embraced life as he found it. This quality he called non-teleological or "is" thinking, a perspective that Steinbeck also assumed in much of his fiction during the 1930s. He wrote with a "detached quality," simply recording what "is."

The working title for Of Mice and Men, for example, was "Something That Happened "- this is simply the way life is. Furthermore, in most of his fiction Steinbeck includes a "Doc" figure, a wise observer of life who epitomizes the idealized stance of the non-

teleological thinker: Doc Burton in In Dubious Battle, Slim in Of Mice and Men, Casy in The Grapes of Wrath, Lee in East of Eden, and of course "Doc" himself in Cannery Row (1945) and the sequel, the rollicking Sweet Thursday (1954). All see broadly and truly and empathetically. Ed Ricketts, patient and thoughtful, a poet and a scientist, helped ground the author's ideas. He was Steinbeck's mentor, his alter ego, and his soul mate. Considering the depth of his eighteen-year friendship with Ricketts, it is hardly surprising that the bond acknowledged most frequently in Steinbeck's oeuvre is friendship between and among men.

Steinbeck's writing style as well as his social consciousness of the 1930s was also shaped by an equally compelling figure in his life, his wife Carol. She helped edit his prose, urged him to cut the Latinate phrases, typed his manuscripts, suggested titles, and offered ways to restructure. In 1935, having finally published his first popular success with tales of Monterey's paisanos, Tortilla Flat, Steinbeck, goaded by Carol, attended a few meetings of nearby Carmel's John Reed Club. Although he found the group's zealotry distasteful, he, like so many intellectuals of the 1930s, was drawn to the communists' sympathy for the working man. Farm workers in California suffered. He set out to write a "biography of a strikebreaker," but from his interviews with a hounded organizer hiding out in nearby Seaside, he turned from biography to fiction, writing one of the best strike novels of the 1900s, In Dubious Battle. Never a partisan novel, it dissects with a steady hand both the ruthlessness of the strike organizers and the rapaciousness of the greedy landowners. What the author sees as dubious about the struggle between organizers and farmers is not who will win but how profound is the effect on the workers trapped in between, manipulated by both interests. At the height of his powers, Steinbeck followed this large canvas with two books that round-out what might be called his labor trilogy. The tightly-focused Of Mice and Men was one of the first in a long line of "experiments," a word he often used to identify a forthcoming project. This "play-novelette," intended to be both a novella and a script for a play, is a tightly-drafted study of bindlestiffs through whose dreams he wanted to represent the universal longings for a home. Both the text and the critically-acclaimed 1937 Broadway play (which won the 1937-1938 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for best play) made Steinbeck a household name, assuring his popularity and, for some, his infamy. His next novel intensified popular debate about Steinbeck's gritty subjects, his uncompromising sympathy for the disenfranchised, and his "crass" language.

The Grapes of Wrath sold out an advance edition of 19,804 by 1939 mid-April; was selling 10,000 copies per week by early May; and had won the Pulitzer Prize for the year (1940). Published at the apex of the Depression, the book about dispossessed farmers captured the decade's angst as well as the nation's legacy of fierce individualism, visionary prosperity, and determined westward movement. It was, like the best of Steinbeck's novels, informed in part by documentary zeal, in part by Steinbeck's ability to trace mythic and biblical patterns. Lauded by critics nationwide for its scope and intensity, The Grapes of Wrath attracted an equally vociferous minority opinion. Oklahoma congressman Lyle Boren said that the dispossessed Joad's story was a "dirty, lying, filthy manuscript." Californians claimed the novel was a scourge on the state's munificence, and an indignant Kern County, its migrant population burgeoning, banned the book well into the 1939-1945 war. The righteous attacked the book's language or its crass gestures: Granpa's struggle to keep his fly buttoned was not, it seemed to some, fit for print. The Grapes of Wrath was a cause celebre.

The author abandoned the field, exhausted from two years of research trips and

personal commitment to the migrants' woes, from the five-month push to write the final version, from a deteriorating marriage to Carol, and from an unnamed physical malady. He retreated to Ed Ricketts and science, announcing his intention to study seriously marine biology and to plan a collecting trip to the Sea of Cortez. The text Steinbeck and Ricketts published in 1941, Sea of Cortez (reissued in 1951 without Ed Ricketts's catalogue of species as The Log from the Sea of Cortez), tells the story of that expedition. It does more, however. The Log portion that Steinbeck wrote (from Ed's notes) in 1940 - at the same time working on a film in Mexico, The Forgotten Village - contains his and Ed's philosophical musings, his ecological perspective, as well as keen observations on Mexican peasantry, hermit crabs, and "dryball" scientists. Quipped New York Times critic Lewis Gannett, there is, in Sea of Cortez, more "of the whole man, John Steinbeck, than any of his novels": Steinbeck the keen observer of life, Steinbeck the scientist, the seeker of truth, the historian and journalist, the writer. Steinbeck was determined to participate in the war effort, first doing patriotic work (The Moon Is Down, 1942, a play-novelette about an occupied Northern European country, and Bombs Away, 1942, a portrait of bomber trainees) and then going overseas for the New York Herald Tribune as a war correspondent. In his war dispatches he wrote about the neglected corners of war that many journalists missed - life at a British bomber station, the allure of Bob Hope, the song "Lili Marlene," and a diversionary mission off the Italian coast. These columns were later collected in Once There Was a War (1958). Immediately after returning to the States, a shattered Steinbeck wrote a nostalgic and lively account of his days on Cannery Row, Cannery Row (1945). In 1945, however, few reviewers recognized that the book's central metaphor, the tide pool, suggested a way to read this non-teleological novel that examined the "specimens" who lived on Monterey's Cannery Row, the street Steinbeck knew so well.

Steinbeck often felt misunderstood by book reviewers and critics, and their barbs rankled the sensitive writer, and would throughout his career. A book resulting from a post-war trip to the Soviet Union with Robert Capa in 1947, A Russian Journal (1948), seemed to many superficial. Reviewers seemed doggedly either to misunderstand his biological naturalism or to expect him to compose another strident social critique like The Grapes of Wrath. Commonplace phrases echoed in reviews of books of the 1940s and other "experimental" books of the 1950s and 1960s: "complete departure," "unexpected." A humorous text like Cannery Row seemed fluff to many. Set in La Paz, Mexico, The Pearl (1947), a "folk tale. . .a black-white story like a parable" as he wrote his agent, tells of a young man who finds an astounding pearl, loses his freedom in protecting his wealth, and finally throws back into the sea the cause of his woes. Reviews noted this as another slim volume by a major author of whom more was expected. The Wayward Bus (1947), a "cosmic Bus," sputtered as well. Steinbeck faltered both professionally and personally in the 1940s. He divorced the loyal but volatile Carol in 1943. That same year he moved east with his second wife, Gwyndolen Conger, a lovely and talented woman nearly twenty years his junior who ultimately came to resent his growing stature and feel that her own creativity - she was a singer - had been stifled. With Gwyn, Steinbeck had two sons, Thom and John, but the marriage started falling apart shortly after the second son's birth, ending in divorce in 1948. That same year Steinbeck was numbed by Ed Ricketts's death. Only with concentrated work on a film script on the life of Emiliano Zapata for Elia Kazan's film Viva Zapata! (1952) would Steinbeck gradually chart a new course. In 1949 he met and in 1950 married his third wife, Elaine Scott, and with her he moved again to New York City, where he lived for the rest of his life. Much of the pain and reconciliation of those late years of the 1940s were worked out in two subsequent novels: his third play-novelette Burning Bright (1950), a boldly experimental parable about a man's

acceptance of his wife's child fathered by another man, and in the largely autobiographical work he'd contemplated since the early 1930s, East of Eden (1952). "It is what I have been practicing to write all of my life," he wrote to painter and author Bo Beskow early in 1948, when he first began research for a novel about his native valley and his people; three years later when he finished the manuscript he wrote his friend again, "This is 'the book'...Always I had this book waiting to be written." With Viva Zapata!, East of Eden, Burning Bright and later The Winter of Our Discontent (1961), Steinbeck's fiction becomes less concerned with the behavior of groups - what he called in the 1930s "group man" - and more focused on an individual's moral responsibility to self and community. The detached perspective of the scientist gives way to a certain warmth; the ubiquitous "self-character" that he claimed appeared in all his novels to comment and observe is modeled less on Ed Ricketts, more on John Steinbeck himself. Certainly with his divorce from Gwyn, Steinbeck had endured dark nights of the soul, and East of Eden contains those turbulent emotions surrounding the subject of wife, children, family, and fatherhood. "In a sense it will be two books," he wrote in his journal (posthumously published in 1969 as Journal of a Novel: The "East of Eden" Letters) as he began the final draft in 1951, "the story of my country and the story of me. And I shall keep these two separate." Early critics dismissed as incoherent the two-stranded story of the Hamiltons, his mother's family, and the Trasks, "symbol people" representing the story of Cain and Abel; more recently critics have come to recognize that the epic novel is an early example of metafiction, exploring the role of the artist as creator, a concern, in fact, in many of his books. Like The Grapes of Wrath, East of Eden is a defining point in his career. During the 1950s and 1960s the perpetually "restless" Steinbeck traveled extensively throughout the world with his third wife, Elaine. With her, he became more social. Perhaps his writing suffered as a result; some claim that even East of Eden, his most ambitious post-Grapes novel, cannot stand shoulder to shoulder with his searing social novels of the 1930s. In the fiction of his last two decades, however, Steinbeck never ceased to take risks, to stretch his conception of the novel's structure, to experiment with the sound and form of language. Sweet Thursday, sequel to Cannery Row, was written as a musical comedy that would resolve Ed Ricketts's loneliness by sending him off into the sunset with a true love, Suzy, a whore with a gilded heart. The musical version by Rodgers and Hammerstein, Pipe Dream , was one of the team's few failures. In 1957 he published the satiric The Short Reign of Pippin IV, a tale about the French Monarchy gaining ascendancy. And in 1961, he published his last work of fiction, the ambitious The Winter of Our Discontent, a novel about contemporary America set in a fictionalized Sag Harbor (where he and Elaine had a summer home). Increasingly disillusioned with American greed, waste, and spongy morality - his own sons seemed textbook cases - he wrote his jeremiad, a lament for an ailing populace. The following year, 1962, Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature; the day after the announcement the New York Times ran an editorial by the influential Arthur Mizener, "Does a Writer with a Moral Vision of the 1930s Deserve the Nobel Prize?" Wounded by the blindside attack, unwell, frustrated and disillusioned, John Steinbeck wrote no more fiction.

But the writer John Steinbeck was not silenced. As always, he wrote reams of letters to his many friends and associates. In the 1950s and 1960s he published scores of journalistic pieces: "Making of a New Yorker," "I Go Back to Ireland," columns about the 1956 national political conventions, and "Letters to Alicia," a controversial series about a 1966 White House-approved trip to Vietnam where his sons were stationed. In the late 1950s — and intermittently for the rest of his life — he worked diligently on a modern English translation of a book he had loved since childhood, Sir Thomas Malory's Morte d'Arthur; the unfinished project was published posthumously as The

Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights (1976). Immediately after completing Winter , the ailing novelist proposed "not a little trip of reporting," he wrote to his agent Elizabeth Otis, "but a frantic last attempt to save my life and the integrity of my creativity pulse." In 1960, he toured America in a camper truck designed to his specifications, and on his return published the highly praised Travels with Charley in Search of America (1962), another book that both celebrates American individuals and decries American hypocrisy; the climax of his journey is his visit to the New Orleans "cheerleaders" who daily taunted black children newly registered in white schools. His disenchantment with American waste, greed, immorality and racism ran deep. His last published book, America and Americans (1966), reconsiders the American character, the land, the racial crisis, and the seemingly crumbling morality of the American people.

In these late years, in fact since his final move to New York in 1950, many accused John Steinbeck of increasing conservatism. True enough that with greater wealth came the chance to spend money more freely. And with status came political opportunities that seemed out of step for a "radical" of the 1930s: he initially defended Lyndon Johnson's views on the war with Vietnam (dying before he could, as he wished, qualify his initial responses). And true enough that the man who spent a lifetime "whipping" his sluggard will (read Working Days: The Journals of "The Grapes of Wrath" [1989] for biting testimony of the struggle) felt intolerance for 1960s protesters whose zeal, in his eyes, was unfocused and whose anger was explosive, not turned to creative solutions. But it is far more accurate to say that the author who wrote The Grapes of Wrath never retreated into conservatism.

He lived in modest houses all his life, caring little for lavish displays of power or wealth. He always preferred talking to ordinary citizens wherever he traveled, sympathizing always with the disenfranchised. He was a Stevenson Democrat in the 1950s. Even in the 1930s, he was never a communist, and after three trips to Russia (1937, 1947, 1963) he hated with increasing intensity Soviet repression of the individual. In fact, neither during his life nor after has the paradoxical Steinbeck been an easy author to pigeonhole personally, politically, or artistically. As a man, he was an introvert and at the same time had a romantic streak, was impulsive, garrulous, a lover of jests and word play and practical jokes. As an artist, he was a ceaseless experimenter with words and form, and often critics did not "see" quite what he was up to. He claimed his books had "layers," yet many claimed his symbolic touch was cumbersome. He loved humor and warmth, but some said he slopped over into sentimentalism. He was, and is now recognized as, an environmental writer. He was an intellectual, passionately interested in his odd little inventions, in jazz, in politics, in philosophy, history, and myth - this range from an author sometimes labeled simplistic by academe. All said, Steinbeck remains one of America's most significant twentieth-century writers, whose popularity spans the world, whose range is impressive, whose output was prodigious: 16 novels, a collection of short stories, four screenplays (The Forgotten Village, The Red Pony, Viva Zapata!, Lifeboat), a sheaf of journalistic essays - including four collections (Bombs Away, Once There Was a War, America and Americans, The Harvest Gypsies) — three travel narratives (Sea of Cortez, A Russian Journal, Travels with Charley), a translation and two published journals (more remain unpublished). Three "play-novelettes" ran on Broadway: Of Mice and Men, The Moon Is Down, and Burning Bright, as did the musical Pipe Dream. Whatever his "experiment" in fiction or journalistic prose, he wrote with empathy, clarity, perspicuity: "In every bit of honest writing in the world," he noted in a 1938 journal entry, "...there is a base theme. Try to understand men, if you understand each other

you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and nearly always leads to love."

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National Steinbeck Center

{https://steinbeck.org/about/}

As one of the largest literary museums in the United States dedicated to a single author, the National Steinbeck Center began as an initiative by the local community and civic leaders to create a forum for his writings and one that would inspire and launch successful literacy and educational programming.

John Steinbeck received worldwide recognition for his perception of the "common man" and his keen observations and powerful descriptions of the human condition and the rich locations like the Salinas Valley in which the characters in his novels inhabited. Positioned at One Main Street in the heart of Salinas, the Center has not only served to revitalize the city's downtown area but has distinguished itself as a locale for global conversations inspired by visiting scholars, speakers, guests, and patrons.

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Quotable Quotes

- A man on a horse is spiritually, as well as physically, bigger than a man on foot.
- Man is the only kind of varmint sets his own trap, baits it, and then steps in it.
- It has always been my private conviction that any man who puts his intelligence up against a fish and loses had it coming.
- I have never smuggled anything in my life. Why then do I feel an uneasy sense of guilt on approaching a customs barrier?
- The profession of book writing makes horse racing seem like a solid stable business.

- It seems to me that if you or I must choose between two courses of thought or action, we should remember our dying and try so to live that our death brings no pleasure on the world.
- Give a critic an inch, he'll write a play.
- We spend our time searching for security and hate it when we get it.
- I've seen a look in dogs' eyes, a quick vanishing look of amazed contempt, and I am convinced that basically dogs think humans are nuts.
- In utter loneliness a writer tries to explain the inexplicable.
- If you're in trouble or hurt or need-go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help-the only ones.
- Nobody sticks a knife in the status quo and gets away with it.

Also visit these Web Pages for MORE!

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02]https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/john-steinbeck-quotes

03]https://quote.org/author/john_steinbeck

04]https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/585.John_Steinbeck

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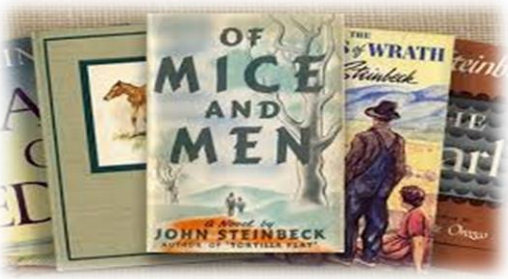

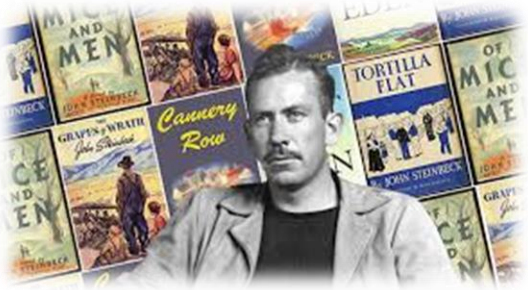

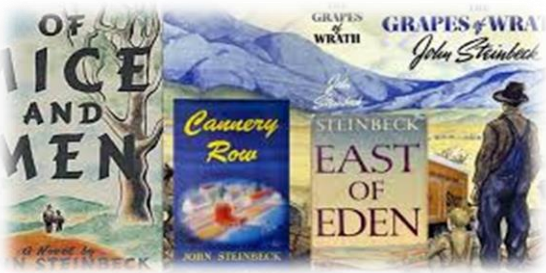

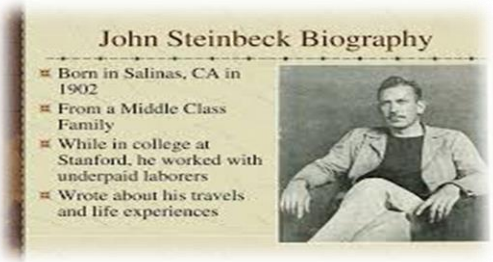
John Steinbeck Biography
Born in Salinas, CA in 1902
From a Middle Class Family
While in college at Stanford, he worked with underpaid laborers
Wrote about his travels and life experiences

13 Apl 1906

22 Dec 1989

Samuel Beckett

Nobel Prize in Literature 1969

Born: 13 April 1906, Dublin, Ireland
Died: 22 December 1989, Paris, France
Residence at the time of the award: Ireland
Prize motivation:

"for his writing, which - in new forms for the novel and drama - in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation"

Language: English; French
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1969/beckett/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize in

- Literature 1957, by R Wagner
- Literature 1963, by Johannes Edfelt
- Literature 1964, by William Stuart Maguinness
- Literature 1964, by Bengt Holmqvist
- Literature 1965, by William Stuart Maguinness
- Literature 1966, by Johannes Edfelt
- Literature 1966, by Léon Cellier
- Literature 1966, by William Stuart Maguinness
- Literature 1966, by William York Tindall

- Literature 1967, by Nelly Sachs
- Literature 1967, by The Swedish PEN Club
- Literature 1967, by William Stuart Maguinness
- Literature 1967, by Per Olov Fredrik Barck
- Literature 1967, by Barbara Gladys Hardy
- Literature 1967, by Siegbert Salomon Prawer
- Literature 1968, by Nelly Sachs
- Literature 1968, by Siegbert Salomon Prawer
- Literature 1968, by William Stuart Maguinness
- Literature 1968, by Matthew John Caldwell Hodgart
- Literature 1968, by Robert Brustein
- Literature 1968, by Gerhard Heilfurth
- Literature 1969, by Christopher Bruce Ricks
- Literature 1969, by Jan Kott
- Literature 1969, by Wolfgang Clemen
- Literature 1969, by Martin Price
- Literature 1969, by H Kreuzer

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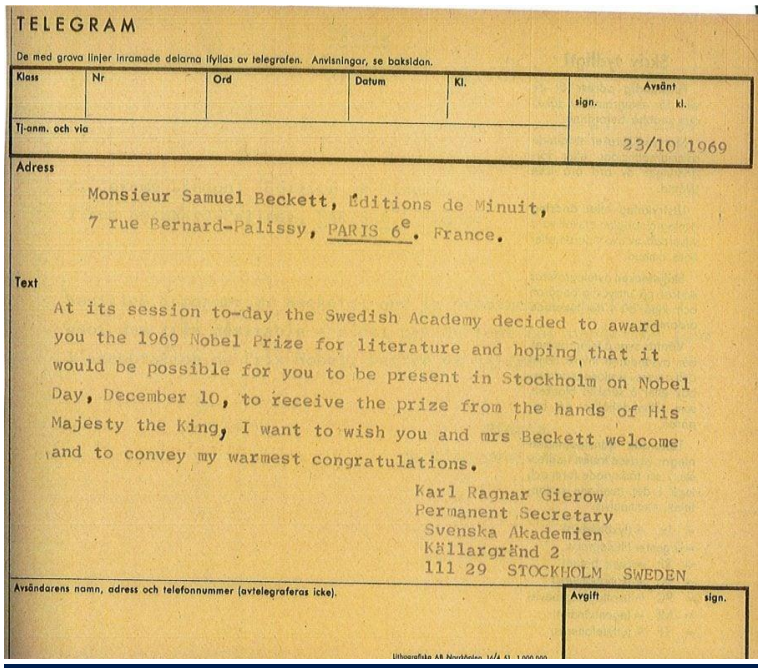
Links to other sites

[01] The Samuel Beckett Endpage at University of Antwerp
[02] Samuel Beckett Society
[03] On Samuel Beckett from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[04] The Samuel Beckett Research Centre at University of Reading

Photo Gallery



TELEGRAM

De med grova linjer inramade delarna ifyllas av telegrafen. Anvisningar, se baksidan.

Klass	Nr	Ord	Datum	Kl.	Avsänt sign.	Avsänt kl.

Tj-anm. och via

23/10 1969

Adress

Monsieur Samuel Beckett, Éditions de Minuit,
7 rue Bernard-Palissy, PARIS 6e. France.

Text

At its session to-day the Swedish Academy decided to award you the 1969 Nobel Prize for literature and hoping that it would be possible for you to be present in Stockholm on Nobel Day, December 10, to receive the prize from the hands of His Majesty the King, I want to wish you and mrs Beckett welcome and to convey my warmest congratulations.

Karl Ragnar Gierow
Permanent Secretary
Svenska Akademien
Källargränd 2
111 29 STOCKHOLM SWEDEN

Avsändarens namn, adress och telefonnummer (avtelegraferas icke).

Avgift sign.

Telegram to Samuel Beckett from the permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy telling him of the announcement of his Nobel Prize in Literature.

Nobel Diploma

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Karl Ragnar Gierow, of the Swedish Academy

(Translation)

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mix a powerful imagination with a logic in absurdum, and the result will be either a paradox or an Irishman. If it is an Irishman, you will get the paradox into the bargain. Even the Nobel Prize in Literature is sometimes divided. Paradoxically, this has happened in 1969, a single award being addressed to one man, two languages and a third nation, itself divided.

Samuel Beckett was born near Dublin in 1906. As a renowned author he entered the world almost half a century later in Paris when, in the space of three years, five works were published that immediately brought him into the centre of interest: the novel *Molloy* in 1951; its sequel, *Malone Meurt*, in the same year; the play, *En Attendant Godot* in 1952; and in the following year the two novels, *L'Innommable*, which concluded the cycle about *Molloy* and *Malone*, and *Watt.*

These dates simply record a sudden appearance. The five works were not new at the time of publication, nor were they written in the order in which they appeared. They had their background in the current situation as well

as in Beckett's previous development. The true nature of *Murphy* , a novel from 1938, and the studies of Joyce (1929) and Proust (1931), which illuminate his own initial position, is perhaps most clearly seen in the light of Beckett's subsequent production. For while he has pioneered new modes of expression in fiction and on the stage, Beckett is also allied to tradition, being closely linked not only to Joyce and Proust but to Kafka as well, and the dramatic works from his debut have a heritage from French works of the 1890s and Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi.*

In several respects, the novel *Watt* marks a change of phase in this remarkable output. Written in 1942-44 in the South of France – whence Beckett fled from the Nazis, having lived for a long time in Paris – it was to be his last work in English for many years; he made his name in French and did not return to his native tongue for about fifteen years. The world around had also changed when Beckett came to write again after *Watt.* All the other works which made his name were written in the period 1945-49. The Second World War is their foundation; it was after this that his authorship achieved maturity and a message. But these works are not about the war itself, about life at the front, or in the French resistance movement (in which Beckett took an active part), but about what happened afterwards, when peace came and the curtain was rent from the unholiest of unholies to reveal the terrifying spectacle of the lengths to which man can go in inhuman degradation – whether ordered or driven by himself – and how much of such degradation man can survive. In this sense the degradation of humanity is a recurrent theme in Beckett's writing and to this extent, his philosophy, simply accentuated by elements of the grotesque and of tragic farce, can be described as a negativism that cannot desist from descending to the depths. To the depths it must go because it is only there that pessimistic thought and poetry can work their miracles. What does one get when a negative is printed? A positive, a clarification, with black proving to be the light of day, the parts in deepest shade those which reflect the light source. Its name is fellow-feeling, charity. There are precedents besides the accumulation of abominations in Greek tragedy which led Aristotle to the doctrine of catharsis, purification through horror. Mankind has drawn more strength from Schopenhauer's bitter well than from Schelling's beatific springs, has been more blessed by Pascal's agonized doubt than by Leibniz's blind rational trust in the best of all possible worlds has reaped – in the field of Irish literature, which has also fed Beckett's writing – a much leaner harvest from the whitewashed clerical pastoral of Oliver Goldsmith than from Dean Swift's vehement denigration of all humankind.

Part of the essence of Beckett's outlook is to be found here – in the difference between an easily-acquired pessimism that rests content with untroubled scepticism, and a pessimism that is dearly bought and which penetrates to mankind's utter destitution. The former commences and concludes with the concept that nothing is really of any value, the latter is based on exactly the opposite outlook. For what is worthless cannot be degraded. The perception of human degradation – which we have witnessed, perhaps, to a greater extent than any previous generation – is not possible if human values are denied. But the experience becomes

all the more painful as the recognition of human dignity deepens. This is the source of inner cleansing, the life force nevertheless, in Beckett's pessimism. It houses a love of mankind that grows in understanding as it plumbs further into the depths of abhorrence, a despair that has to reach the utmost bounds of suffering to discover that compassion has no bounds. From that position, in the realms of annihilation, rises the writing of Samuel Beckett like a miserere from all mankind, its muffled minor key sounding liberation to the oppressed, and comfort to those in need.

This seems to be stated most clearly in the two masterpieces, *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days*, each of which, in a way, is a development of a biblical text. In the case of *Godot* we have, 'Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?' The two tramps are confronted with the meaninglessness of existence at its most brutal. It may be a human figure; no laws are as cruel as those of creation and man's peculiar status in creation comes from being the only creature to apply these laws with deliberately evil intent. But if we conceive of a providence – a source even of the immeasurable suffering inflicted by, and on, mankind – what sort of almighty is it that we – like the tramps – are to meet somewhere, some day? Beckett's answer consists of the title of the play. By the end of the performance, as at the end of our own, we know nothing about this *Godot.* At the final curtain we have no intimation of the force whose progress we have witnessed. But we do know one thing, of which all the horror of this experience cannot deprive us: namely, our waiting. This is man's metaphysical predicament of perpetual, uncertain expectation, captured with true poetic simplicity: *En attendant Godot, Waiting for Godot.*

The text for *Happy Days* – "a voice crying in the wilderness" – is more concerned with the predicament of man on earth, of our relationships with one another. In his exposition Beckett has much to say about our capacity for entertaining untroubled illusions in a wilderness void of hope. But this is not the theme. The action simply concerns how isolation, how the sand rises higher and higher until the individual is completely buried in loneliness. Out of the suffocating silence, however, there still rises the head, the voice crying in the wilderness, man's indomitable need to seek out his fellow men right to the end, speak to his peers and find in companionship his solace.

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Honours and Awards

- Croix de guerre (France)
- Médaille de la Résistance (France)
- 1959 honorary doctorate from Trinity College Dublin

- 1961 International Publishers' Formentor Prize (shared with Jorge Luis Borges)
- 1968 Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences
- 1969 Nobel Prize in Literature
- Saoi of Aosdana (Ireland)
- 2016 The house that Beckett lived at in 1934 (48 Paultons Square, Chelsea, London) received an English Heritage Blue Plaque
- Obies (for Off-Broadway plays):
- 1958: *Endgame*
- 1960: *Krapp's Last Tape*
- 1962: *Happy Days*
- 1964: *Play*

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Videos

[01] Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot | University of Birmingham

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXgIOEWaGhs [27:29]

Dr David Pattie delivers an undergraduate taster lecture on 'The meaning of Godot' as part of the Department of Drama and Theatre Arts' Offer-Holder Visit Day at the University of Birmingham.

[02] Theatre and Language: Samuel Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot' - Professor Belinda Jack

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kv1CsurLHDQ[56:11]

Beckett's Waiting for Godot has been interpreted in myriad ways. Some claim it is a work that explores the bleak absurdism of human life. Others have argued that it is an allegory of various kinds. These will be explored, but also the question as to what is it about the play that lends itself to such diverse interpretations? Plays are more than language. Is it in the relationship between language and the other aspects of theatre craft that the most convincing interpretation of the play lies?

[03] English Literature | Samuel Beckett - The Theatre of the Absurd: Waiting for Godot & Endgame

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-P6guVmfc8 [25:11]

Samuel Beckett, one of the most representative playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd, has deeply influenced the Modern Literature in Europe during the 20th century.

His major works, Waiting for Godot and Endgame, are a metaphor of the meaningless and hopeless nature of human existence.

[04] SAMUEL BECKETT: Murphy, Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, How It Is, Watt, & Waiting for Godot

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teB1U6i6YFg [2:20:6]

[05] Samuel Beckett: As the Story Was Told documentary (1996)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRW9S4Wmldw [1:43:40]

The life of Irish novelist, poet, and playwright Samuel Beckett is profiled in this two-part documentary: from his Dublin childhood, to his days in Paris, associating with Picasso and Chagall, to old age. Excerpts from a performance of the semiautobiographical Krapp's Last Tape and previously unpublished letters tell the story, along with the remembrances of Beckett's lifelong friend and publisher, Jerome Lindon, relatives, and others who knew him. This is a rare glimpse into the reclusive world of this literary giant, whose most famous work, Waiting for Godot, evokes with unnerving precision the cosmic despair and isolation of modern humankind.

[06] Samuel Beckett - Waiting for Godot (San Quentin Workshop, 1988)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q77jgal4Gto [2:18:02]

Two seemingly homeless men waiting for someone or something named Godot. Vladimir and Estragon wait near a tree on a barren stretch of road, inhabiting a drama spun from their own consciousness.

Samuel Beckett's absurdist play, Waiting for Godot, premiered in Paris in 1953, at the Théâtre de Babylone, under the direction of French actor, Roger Blin. Many other directors staged the play in the years to come, each time interpreting it in their own way. All the while, Beckett complained that the play was being subjected to "endless misunderstanding." However, when an actor, Peter Woodthrope, once asked him to explain what Godot is all about, Beckett answered quixotically: "It's all symbiosis, Peter; it's symbiosis."

Beckett never gave a clear explanation. But perhaps he offered up something better. In 1985, Beckett directed three of his plays — Waiting for Godot, Krapp's Last Tape and Endgame — as part of a production called "Beckett Directs Beckett." The plays performed by the San Quentin Players toured Europe and Asia with much fanfare, and with Beckett exerting directorial control.

[07] I'll Go On: An Afternoon of Samuel Beckett

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5UF2-2kqaw [1:38:18]

Roundtable discussion with Edward Albee, Tom Bishop, Alvin Epstein, Lois Oppenheim, and John Turturro.

[08] Great Books: Waiting for Godot, by Samuel Beckett

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnQ1Vp_Wi04 [44:51]

Andrea Broomfield discusses 'Waiting for Godot' by Samuel Beckett. The Great Books Mini-Lecture Series is designed to introduce you to watershed

texts that have changed readers' views of the world. It's a series of short talks on great books.

[09] Searching for Sam - Adrian Dunbar on Samuel Beckett (BBC)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLSbBSz1im4 [58:34]

BBC documentary. Samuel Beckett has fascinated Adrian Dunbar since he was a young student. Now, 30 years after Beckett's death in Paris, Dunbar explores what made the man who made Waiting for Godot.

[10] "For Samuel Beckett" by Morton Feldman, with host Amadeus Regucera

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OOdHyGafpg [1:01:24]

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players present
For Samuel Beckett by Morton Feldman
Host, Amadeus Regucera.

[11] GREAT BOOKS 19: Samuel Beckett, with Nicholas Johnson (Trinity College Dublin) | Think About It

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P12Rvv_4Dbw [1:04:43]

"Another heavenly day" is the opening line of Beckett's play Happy Days, where Winnie sits buried to her waist in sand with her husband Willie stuck a few feet away from her... but language, memory and consciousness are not all she has. Beckett's plays, four novels, poetry, radio plays and prose reveal our deepest humanity by stripping language to its bare essentials. Beckett wrote all of his work in French, a language he learned mostly as an adult, and then translated it back into his native English to purge it of clichés and stock phrases. In the resulting works he reveals how our bodies moving through space are far more than vessels for a roving consciousness. They contain a hint of transcendence which manifests itself as the human need for self-expression through which we locate ourselves in time, in relation to others, and in relation to ourselves. But if Beckett had shared a fate with any of his protagonists, or anti-heroes, he would not be known to us at all, as E.M. Cioran points out. Beckett gives the impression of not caring about either success or failure, and of maintaining an almost Buddhist indifference about what happens to him and his work. In addition, while the novels are quite long, and the characters go on and on and on, Beckett is extremely reticent, revealing little about himself and yet making it unmistakably clear that self-expression is for him at the heart of our existence. I spoke with Beckett expert, scholar and theater director Nick Johnson at the Samuel Beckett Theatre at University College in Dublin, where Beckett taught for a short time in the 1920s before giving up on academia, moving to Paris, and becoming a writer next to James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Hemingway and others. Our conversation shows how Beckett's work is surprisingly optimistic about the power of art and language to give us meaning. "I can't go on, I must go on, I go on" is the final line of Beckett's trilogy of novel. Nick explained how these words

show Beckett's relentless commitment to strip our existence down to the basics (who we are, what we have, what we want) and then move deeper from there. Instead of adding more words and complexity, Beckett shows that our searching may be our life's meaning and that not knowing what we want is in fact the key to knowing ourselves. "You have to pay attention and be as informed as possible, you have to try to understand things, and you have to speak out!" is Nick's summary of what Beckett's works mean for him. In a time of historic and political turmoil, it's an urgent imperative and we would do well to heed it.

[12] Beckett's Happy Days by the Open Theatre Group

https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=323339312300123 [1:23:16]

[13] The Letters of Samuel Beckett (2009)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2KHn1amTJA [1:00:45]

The editors of Samuel Beckett's letters discuss the influence of music on Beckett's art. With Martha Fehsenfeld and Lois Overbeck.

[14] Samuel Beckett: Silence to Silence documentary (1991)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ffMoTfGCfY [1:17:53]

The elusive author of Waiting for Godot cooperated in the production of this portrait, which traces Beckett's artistic life through his prose, plays, and poetry. Billie Whitelaw, Jack McGowran, and Patrick Magee—Beckett's great dramatic interpreters—appear in selected extracts from the plays; Beckett specialist David Warrilow narrates a variety of texts.

[15] Samuel Beckett again 😀 sorry for sound, dropped the mic, discovered half way in!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyXQr-DUbQc [1:16:02]

[16] Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape: Literature And Modernism lecture 2020

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1-Fbtna5PU [46:35]

I made this lecture for my students in the Literature and Modernism unit at Moansh University. Beckett came at the end of the course, after weeks on André Breton, Jean Cocteau, Leonora Carrington, Lu Xun, Eileen Chang, Ding Ling, and Jean Rhys.

So in addition to helping my students understand Beckett, I wanted to see what I could do with a 50 minute "lecture" slot under lockdown. I gave myself an afternoon and an evening to produce the finished product (which encoded overnight and was uploaded the next morning) from notes I had written in a previous year.

To abandon the 50 minute concentration span is, in my opinion, to concede too much territory to a troubling ideology that assumes a thinking elite will manage the attention of the rest of the population for their own ends. Teaching students to have their attention managed by other people is a problematic way to prepare them to thrive in a world in which attention is a commodity that is viciously and expertly hoarded.

Teaching students to manage their own attention and to focus for extended periods is, perhaps, one of the most empowering life lessons we can teach during their time with us, providing them with a significant bulwark against being manipulated in the years beyond university.

[17] Samuel Beckett – Mystic

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jyvyy4Gpcpc [1:14:41]

[18] A Wake for Samuel Beckett: Classic Performances

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ma-rOP2Brw [2:07:57]

A celebration of the work of Samuel Beckett with classic performances. Watch "Murphy" @ 05:30 ; "All that Fall" @ 11:45 ; "Molloy" @ 25:20 ; "Waiting for Godot" @ 34:43 ; "Krapp's Last Tape" @ 1:25:45 ; "Eh Joe" @ 1:59:35 . With Pauline Delany, James Greene, Jack MacGowran, Ronald Pickup, Billie Whitelaw.

Krapp's Last Tape with Patrick Magee and Eh Joe with Jack MacGowran. Both these actors were, until their deaths, the outstanding performers of Samuel Beckett's plays and his own favourites. He had heard Magee's 'cracked voice' on radio and wrote the part of Krapp especially for him. And Jack MacGowran 's extraordinary battered face became the perfect emblem for Beckett's solitary figure in a bleak and relentless world. Eh Joe, the first play Beckett wrote specifically for television, was made in 1966 and Krapp's Last Tape, written in 1958 was performed for television in 1972.

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Samuel Beckett Award

{https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Beckett_Award}

The **Samuel Beckett Award** was a British award set up in 1983 and, over the next decade, awarded to writers, who in the opinion of a committee of critics, producers and publishers, showed innovation and excellence in writing for the performing arts. The award was established in honour of Irish Nobel Laureate, novelist, playwright and poet Samuel Beckett and in recognition of his distinctive contribution to world theatre and literature.

Notable winners

- Farrukh Dhondy
- Nick Perry
- Karim Alrawi

- Anne Devlin
- Shirley Gee
- Jim Cartwright
- Ronald Frame
- Kevin Elyot

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Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award

{https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_Samuel_Beckett_Theatre_Trust_Award}

The **Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award** is an annual award established in 2003 and granted by the Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust to support the showcasing of innovative theatre by a company or individual. According to the director of the trust Romilly Walton Masters in 2003:

From the outset, the Trust has had a specific interest in aiding artists of the avant-garde who often have to wait many years before they are taken up by the commercial theatre. Through this award, the Trust is looking to help an artist, or a group, realize a fully resourced professional production. It is looking to assist artists that hitherto may not have had this opportunity. The aim is to support work of quality and promise, and we fully expect the work submitted to be of the highest calibre.

Winners

2000s

- 2003 - *Cue Deadly* by Dan Hine and Kirsty Housley
- 2004 - *The Pink Bits* by Lucy Ellinson, Wendy Hubbard, Mamoru Iriguchi, Sarah Levinsky and Ben Pacey
- 2005 - *Almost Blue* by Gareth Fry, Lu Kemp, Dominic Leclerc, Neil Laidlaw, and Chris Dunkley
- 2006 - *Project E: An Explosion* by The Work Theatre Collective[8]
- 2007 - *The Terrific Electric* by Boileroom
- 2008 - *Helium* by Slung Low
- 2009 - *Room Temperature Romance* by Levantes Dance Theatre[12]

2010s

- 2010 - *You Me Bum Bum Train* by Kate Bond and Morgan Lloyd[13]
- 2013 - *The Paper Architect* by Kristin McGuire and Davy McGuire[14][15]
- 2014 - *Camera Lucida* by Dickie Beau
- 2015 - *The Body* by Nigel Barett and Louise Mari
- 2016 - *The Machine* by Collectif and then...
- 2017 - *Roller* by Rachel Mars and Nat Tarrab
- 2018 - *Marathon* by JAMS with Alan Fielden, Sophie Grodin, Malachy Orozo and Jemima Young
- 2019 - *Nosedive* by Superfan

2020s

- 2020 - *Prime_Time* by In Bed with My Brother
- 2022 - *The UK Drill Project* by HighRise Entertainment and *Perfect Show for Rachel* by Zoo Co
- 2024 - *Quiet Songs* by Finn Beames & Company

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Dublin **UNESCO** City of Literature

{https://www.dublincityofliterature.ie/literary-city/featured-authors/samuel-beckett}

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born on 13 April 1906 at 'Cooldrinagh', Foxrock, Co. Dublin – a locale that would go on to feature in both his prose and plays. He studied modern literature and romance languages at Trinity College Dublin, representing the college at various sports including golf, cricket, chess and motor-racing. Following his graduation, Beckett briefly taught at Campbell College in Belfast before taking up a post at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris – where he was introduced to fellow Irish author James Joyce, who he would assist in his writings in various ways. It was here that Beckett began his career as a writer, publishing his first short story "Assumption" and winning a prize for his poem "Whoroscope".

In 1930, Beckett returned to Trinity College, this time as a lecturer, but ultimately resigned after only four terms of teaching in December 1931. Over the next years, Beckett would alternate between residence in Ireland and travel throughout Europe, in what was a period of both personal and professional difficulty for the author, as he struggled with his father's death, psychological treatment, illness and uncertainty about the future of his career.

In 1938, Beckett made the decision to settle permanently in Paris, remaining even as he was near-fatally stabbed by a notorious pimp, and when war broke out in 1939 – remarking that he preferred "France at war to Ireland at peace". As a citizen of neutral Ireland, Beckett was able to remain in Paris during the occupation by Nazi Germany, secretly acting as part of an underground resistance group with his then

lover and later wife French pianist Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil until its eventual betrayal in 1942 necessitated his flight to the unoccupied zone of France. For his contribution to the resistance he was later awarded both the Croix de Guerre and the Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française.

Post-war, during a visit to his mother in Ireland, Beckett underwent a revelation, widely considered to be a pivotal moment in his literary career, and became immersed in his writings. During this period, he produced the novels *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951), *The Unnamable* (1953) as well as two plays, the unpublished *Eleutheria*, and his most famous work: *Waiting for Godot*, which brought Beckett to the world stage. Following the breakaway success of Waiting for Godot, Beckett went on to write further successful plays such as *Endgame* (1957), *All That Fall* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Happy Days* (1961) and *Play* (1963), in addition to serving as a theatre director and writing sporadically – extending his repertoire to include cinema, radio and television.

In 1961, Beckett was jointly awarded the International Publishers' Formentor Prize, and in 1969 won the Nobel Prize in Literature, which he accepted reluctantly on behalf of the late James Joyce and the publisher Jérôme Lindon, who supported his writings. He died in Paris on 22 December 1989, and was buried in the cimetière du Montparnasse alongside his wife, who passed 5 months prior.

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28 May 1912

30 Sep 1990

Patrick White

Nobel Prize in Literature 1973

Born: 28 May 1912, London, United Kingdom
Died: 30 September 1990, Sydney, Australia
Residence at the time of the award: Australia
Prize motivation:

"for an epic and psychological narrative
art which has introduced a
new continent into literature"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1973/white/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1968, by Muriel Clara Bradbrook
- Literature 1969, by Stanley Brogden
- Literature 1969, by Leslie Rees
- Literature 1970, by Nils Artur Lundkvist
- Literature 1970, by Muriel Clara Bradbrook
- Literature 1970, by Gerald Wilkes
- Literature 1970, by H Rogers

- Literature 1970, by Leslie Rees
- Literature 1970, by Hesba Fay Brinsmead
- Literature 1971, by Leslie Rees
- Literature 1971, by Esko Pennanen
- Literature 1972, by Muriel Clara Bradbrook
- Literature 1972, by Leslie Rees
- Literature 1972, by H Rogers
- Literature 1972, by Esko Pennanen
- Literature 1973, by Neva Clarke McKenna
- Literature 1973, by Nils Artur Lundkvist
- Literature 1973, by Leslie Rees
- Literature 1973, by Berta Johnstone
- Literature 1973, by Tauno Frans Mustanoja
- Literature 1973, by Dora Somerville

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Links to other sites

[01] On Patrick White from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02]"Why bother with Patrick White?"at National Library of Australia web archive
[03] Manuscript Collections Relating to Patrick White in the National Library of Australia
[04] Biography from Australian Dictionary of Biography

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Banquet Speech

As the Laureate was unable to be present
at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm,
December 10, 1973, the speech was read by M. Sidney Nolan

Your Majesty, and Gentlemen of the Swedish Academy

It is with great regret that I cannot revisit Stockholm on such an occasion as today. But to revisit and attend in thought will not be difficult, as one of the memories from travels in my youth is connected with the Town Hall of Stockholm. When I was sixteen my parents and I travelled up from Malmö by train. Although this was many years ago and the visit only a brief one, there are still left in my memory the crossing of waters, walks along the quays of Stockholm, and the then new Town Hall. (Perhaps I shall also venture to add it was in Stockholm that I drank my first glass of wine.) Climatic conditions and my health permitting it is my wish to return once again, looking with a youth's memories and an old man's eyes on the city from which so large an honour has now been bestowed upon me.

Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Artur Lundkvist, of the Swedish Academy

Translation from the Swedish text

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's Nobel Prize for Literature has been awarded by the Swedish Academy to the Australian Patrick White. In the – as always – brief citation, mention is made of "his epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature". These words have been somewhat misunderstood in certain quarters. They are only intended to emphasize the prominent position occupied by Patrick White in the literature of his country: they should not be taken to deny the existence of an important body of Australian literature apart from his writings.

In fact, a long succession of authors have endowed Australian literature with an independence and a character which are unmistakably Australian and by virtue of which that literature has long deserved to be regarded in the eyes of the world as something more than an extension of the English tradition. It will be sufficient here to mention such names as Henry Lawson and Henry Handel Richardson. Lawson was the son of an immigrant Norwegian seaman by the name of Larsen, and in his short stories he gave authentic expression to various types of down-to-earth Australian experience. The authoress writing under the name of Henry Handel Richardson achieved in her most important sequence of novels an authentic and grandiose memorial to her father as the exponent of a lingering British way of life in Australia. Nor should one neglect a number of ambitious but somewhat recondite poets who have heightened Australian awareness and intensified the expressive powers of their language.

For all his originality, there is no denying that the work of Patrick White displays certain typical features of Australian literature generally sharing with it the background, natural history and ways of life of the country. It is also well known that White stands in close relation to advanced Australian pictorial artists such as Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd and Russel Drysdale, who with the means at their disposal aim at something of the same expressiveness as he sets out to achieve in his writing. Also it is an encouraging sign that White's influence has gradually made itself felt and that several of the most promising young writers are to be seen as his successors in one way or another.

At the same time, however, it should be emphasized that White is less preoccupied than some of his representative colleagues with things specifically Australian. Although most of his novels are set against an

Australian background, his main concern has been to depict people whose problems and living situations are highly individualized, transcending the local and the national. Even in his most typically Australian epic, *The Tree of Man*, in which an important part is played by nature and society, his principal aim has been to portray his characters from the inside, to make them come alive not so much in terms of typical or atypical settler careers as in the guise of unique individuals. And when he accompanies his explorer Voss into the wilderness of the continent, that wilderness becomes first and foremost a dramatic scenario for the obsession and self-sacrifice of a Nietzschean willpower.

One is struck by the frequency with which Patrick White has made his main characters to a greater or lesser degree outsiders in relation to society: aliens, maladjusted or retarded people and quite often mystics and zealots. It is as though in these people, destitute and vulnerable as they are, he found it easiest to discern the human qualities which fascinate him. This is the case with the characters of *Riders in the Chariot*, whose alien status or deviation brings them persecution and suffering but who in a mystical way are also the elect, victorious in their misfortune. It is also the case with the two brothers in *The Solid Mandala*, with their contradictory characters: the well-adjusted but spiritually barren and the clumsy but intuitively percipient. In a way it is also true of the all-pervading principal characters in White's two latest and largest novels: the artist in *The Vivisector* and the old woman in *The Eye of the Storm*. In the artist the creative urge is portrayed as a species of curse, as a result of which his art becomes an all-consuming effort of which both its practitioner and the people close to him become the victims. In the old woman the author has taken the experience of a cyclone as the mystical centre from which an insight radiates to shed light on her life, with its many misadventures, right up to the moment of her death.

Patrick White is a rather difficult author not only because of his special ideas and problems but also perhaps no less due to his unusual combination of epic and poetic qualities. In his broad narrative he uses a highly compressed language, a verbal art worked out to the last detail and constantly aiming for a maximum of expressive effect, a relentless intensification or a subtle penetration. Here beauty and truth are closely allied or completely fused together: a beauty radiating light and life, evoking the poetry inherent in things, in nature and in all manner of phenomena, and truth which exposes and liberates, even though at first it may seem repugnant or frightening.

Patrick White is a social critic mainly through his depiction of human beings, as befits a true novelist. He is first and foremost a bold psychological explorer, at the same time as he readily refers to ideological views of life or mystical convictions to elicit the support and the uplifting message which they have to offer. His relationship to himself, like his relationship to his fellow beings, is complex and full of contradictions. Exalted demands are thrown into sharp relief against emphatic denials. Passion and longing are confronted by a distinct puritanism. In contradistinction to what may be pride in himself he glorifies humility and humiliation, a persistent feeling of guilt that

demands atonement and sacrifice. He is constantly assailed by doubts concerning the capacity of thought and art, even though he is indefatigable in his high-minded pursuit of both these things.

Patrick White's literary art has spread his fame throughout the world and he now ranks as Australia's foremost representative in his field. His creative work, performed in solitude and doubtless in the teeth of considerable opposition, in various kinds of adversity, has gradually yielded lasting and progressively more widely acknowledged results, in spite of the doubts he himself may have had concerning the value of his efforts. The controversial side of Patrick White is connected with the extreme tension of his self-expression, with his assault on the most difficult problems: the very qualities that constitute his indisputable greatness. Without those qualities he would be unable to bestow the consolation now present in the very midst of his gloom: the conviction that there must be something more worth living for than our onward rushing civilization seems to offer.

The Swedish Academy regrets that Patrick White is not here to-day. But as his representative we greet one of his best friends, the excellent Australian artist Sidney Nolan. And now I beg you, Mr. Nolan, to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, awarded to Patrick White, from the hands of His Majesty the King.

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Swedish Academy

The Permanent Secretary

Press release

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1973

The Australian **Patrick White** has been awarded the 1973 Nobel Literature Prize "for an epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature", as it says in the Swedish Academy's citation. White's growing fame is based chiefly on seven novels of which the earliest masterly work is *The Aunt's Story*, a portrayal imbued with remarkable feeling of a lonely, unmarried, Australian woman's life during experiences that extend also to Europe and America. The book with which White really made his name, however, was *The Tree of Man*, an epically broad and psychologically discerning account of a part of Australian social development in the form of two people's long life together, and struggle against outward and inward difficulties.

Another aspect of Australia is shown in *Voss*, in which a fanatical explorer in the country's interior meets his fate: an intensive character study against the background of the fascinating Australian wilds. The writer displays yet another kind of art in *Riders in the Chariot*, with special emphasis on his cystic and symbolic tendencies: a sacrificial drama, tense, yet with an everyday setting, in the midst of current Australian reality. From contrasting viewpoints, *The Solid Mandala* gives a double portrait of two brothers, in which the sterilely rational brother is set against the fertilely intuitive one, who is almost a fool in the eyes of the world.

White's last two books are among his greatest feats, both as to size and to frenzied building up of tension. *The Vivisector* is the imaginary biography of an artist, in which a whole life is disclosed in a relentless scrutiny of motives and springs of action: an artist's untiring battle to express the utmost while sacrificing both himself and his fellow-beings in the attempt. *The Eye of the Storm* places an old, dying woman in the centre of a narrative which revolves round, and encloses, the whole of her environment, past and present, until we have come to share an entire life panorama, in which everyone is on a decisive dramatic footing with the old lady.

Particularly, these latest books show White's unbroken creative power, an ever deeper restlessness and seeking urge, an onslaught against vital problems that have never ceased to engage him, and a wrestling with

the language in order to extract all its power and all its nuances, to the verge of the unattainable. White's literary production has failings that belong to great and bold writing, exceeding, as it does, different kinds of conventional limits. He is the one who, for the first time, has given the continent of Australia an authentic voice that carries across the world, at the same time as his achievement contributes to the development, both artistic and, as regards ideas, of contemporary literature.

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Article

Patrick White – Existential explorer

by Karin Hansson*

This article was published on 29 August 2001.

Nobel Prize

When Patrick White was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973, the Swedish Academy's commendation referred to the author's epic and psychological narrative art as having introduced a new continent into literature. This standpoint may seem surprising now, but at that time it was a generally valid Swedish (and European) perspective – up to then literary criticism had largely ignored post-colonial writing and other new literatures in English. In many non-European countries, however, Patrick White was a well-known name, and he had already won prestigious prizes. His Nobel Literature Prize was the first to be awarded to an Australian, it is true, but the quality of Australian literature in general and of Patrick White's writing in particular had long been recognized, not only by Australians, but also outside the country. To White's fellow-countrymen, the Nobel Prize confirmed his status as a major novelist whose fiction had, for more than twenty years, been regarded as an important

With the prize-money he created the PATRICK WHITE LITERARY AWARD to encourage the development of Australian literature. The committee has been instructed to give precedence to authors whose writing has not yet received due recognition. Among the winners have been Christina Stead, Randolph Stow, Thea Astley, and Gerald Murnane.

A fierce disdain of the commonplace.

European or Australian?

It is important to recognize White's conflicting loyalties to Europe and Australia. In many respects the European background and influences are obvious in his writing. After spending his first school years at private schools in New South Wales, he was sent at the age of thirteen, very much against his will, to Cheltenham College in England. There he spent a "four-year prison sentence," according to his autobiography, *Flaws in the Glass* (1981). All the same, after a couple of years as a jackeroo on his uncle's sheep station in Australia, he chose to return to England and Cambridge in order to study modern languages. He also spent some vacations in Germany and developed a lasting interest in German and French literature.

After taking his degree, intent on forging a career for himself as a writer, he settled in London to write novels, plays and poetry. His first novel, *Happy Valley* (1939) was praised by some British critics, but the next, *The Living and the Dead* (1941), forced out prematurely because of the impending war, was a failure even according to the writer himself. The same year he received his Royal Air Force posting as an Intelligence Officer in the Middle East and Greece. His experiences in the Western Desert led him to the reading of Australian explorers. Eire's *Journal of Expeditions into Central Australia* evoked in him "the terrible nostalgia for the desert landscapes," a feeling that was to influence his later novels, above all *Voss.* His first visit to his native country after the war made him decide to settle in Australia. He was then nearly forty years old.

Merging external Australian details with abstractions from his European experience.

Even though all the later novels are wholly or mainly set in Australia, they belong to the European epic tradition insofar as they are inspired by and based on Greek mythology, Judeo-Christian mysticism, C.G. Jung's psychology, and the Joycean stream-of-consciousness technique. White has quite often been compared to the greatest among Russian and French novelists. After his return, external Australian conditions and details merged with abstractions from his European experience. In consequence, tensions both between Europe and Australia and between a "real" and a "symbolic" Australia became significant. There is also an obvious love-hate relationship with the country of his childhood. His disappointment in the materialism and shallowness of what he terms the Great Australian Emptiness, is very marked in the essay "The Prodigal Son" (1958), in which he expresses serious misgivings about the country's future. This attitude also comes to the fore in his writing, and caused many critics to accuse him of elitism and intellectual snobbery. White's "Australianness" and commitment to the continent are nevertheless generally recognized in the sense that his return brought true colours back to his palette and, in *The Aunt's Story* (1947), introduced a new style into his canon, initiating novels of depth and dedication.

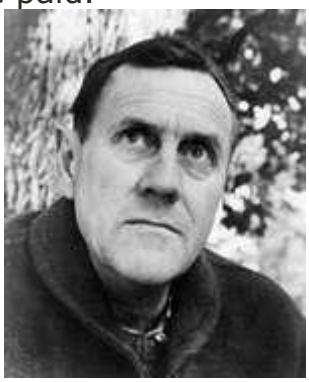
THE FIRST PHASE

The Aunt's Story and The Tree of Man

For many reasons, the two novels *The Aunt's Story* and *The Tree of Man* can be considered as the initial phase of a novel sequence. Unlike the earlier books, they are concerned with the most fundamental issues of humanity, such as the relationship between madness and sanity, reality and illusion, and the problem of communication in existential matters. For the first time, the idea of movement is structurally and consistently combined with the search for ultimate truth, the quest. Here, as in his later books, the characters are divided into two categories from a spiritual point of view: the living and the dead. The true questers are explicitly heading for salvation or damnation in a religious sense, not merely for an intenser form of life. They are opposed to the materialistic characters, who are rooted in social conventions, dreaming of possessions and gentility.

The Aunt's Story presents the quest of Theodora Goodman, a spinster, "dry, leathery and yellow." She is the first in a series of alienated, humble seekers in search of a true reality behind the appearances of social life. Like Theodora, they are all facing the choice "between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality." Increasingly estranged from ordinary life, she passes through a series of heightened moments of insight and awareness, "epiphanies" to use James Joyce's term, leading up to final illumination. The question is asked whether spiritual illumination is compatible with the retention of selfhood and mental sanity. Theodora Goodman's ending is characteristically ambiguous. To the world, she appears to be mentally deranged when she is finally led away by Doctor Holstius, whose name hints at a sense of ultimate wholeness. Holstius knows that "lucidity isn't necessarily a perpetual ailment," and he

summarises the lesson she has learnt: "You cannot reconcile joy and sorrow. Or flesh and marble, or illusion and reality, or life and death. For this reason, Theodora Goodman, you must accept." Like all the later questers, she experiences that "for the pure abstract pleasure of knowing, there was a price paid."



Searching for the ultimate truth.

The changes in setting between the various parts of the novel are related to the mental development of the protagonist to such an extent that it is unclear whether Theodora's odyssey carries her across oceans and continents in a physical sense, or whether the whole journey takes place in her troubled mind. There is a significant epigraph from Olive Schreiner for the third part of the novel: "When your life is most real, to me you are mad."

The Tree of Man was the first novel to win international acclaim. On the narrative level, it deals with the hardships of a farming couple, Stan and Amy Parker, in New South Wales. The frame is that of the conventional pioneering saga, albeit with biblical overtones and associations. Stan is one of White's characteristic seekers, and his spiritual capacity is set off against Amy's conventional attitudes. Stan "respected and accepted her mysteries, as she could never respect and accept his." The story contains the typical features of Australia's natural trials and disasters, such as bushfires, drought, and floods, but above all it enacts the psychological drama of Stan's desire to understand the purposes of God, which "are made clear to some old women, and nuns and idiots." The background and aim of the novel are indicated in White's essay "The Prodigal Son":
It was the exaltation of the "average" that made me panic most, and in this frame of mind, in spite of myself, I began to conceive another novel. Because the void I had to fill was so immense, I wanted to try to suggest in this book every possible aspect of life, through the lives of an ordinary man and woman. But at the same time I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry, which alone could make bearable the lives of such people, and incidentally, my own life since my return.

So I began to write THE TREE OF MAN.

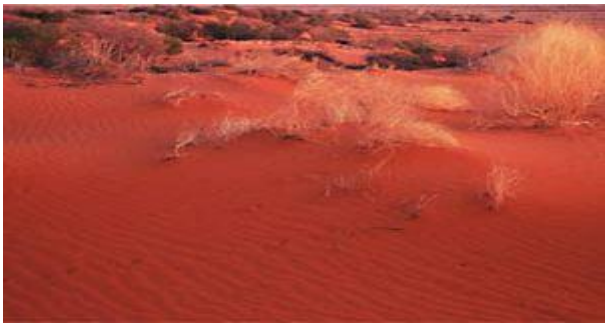
Like Theodora, just before he dies Stan is granted a moment of illumination and universal harmony, finally understanding that "One, and no other figure is the answer to all sums."

THE SECOND PHASE

Voss, Riders in the Chariot, and The Solid Mandala

If the novels of the first phase focus on one single protagonist, those of the second are built up around more than one central character; two, four, and two respectively. All of them are presented as being exceptional, different, puzzling, or even repulsive. In this respect, White's theme is the reverse, namely to show the ordinariness in which man's divinity is contained behind outward exceptionality. The characters are also conscious of their otherness in a way Theodora and Stan were not, and they seem to accept it to the extent that they even seem to take a pride in it. All three books have a dimension of religious mysticism and contain celestial images related to different myths and archetypes: the Comet, the Chariot, the Sun and the Moon. The mandala belongs to the same sphere. In this structural system we find symmetrically grouped principal figures such as the circle, the square, and the cross. In all three novels, there is a general movement towards a centre representing wholeness, psychological and religious. We also find elements from the mythological beliefs of the Australian aborigines.

Voss is based on the story of the German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt. Like him, Voss intends to cross the Australian continent from east to west with a group of men. The three stages of his quest are represented by coast/city, bush, and interior/desert, respectively. Voss, dominated by willpower, megalomania and egocentricity, has been compared both to Faust and Hitler. The desert, he thinks, will prove a worthy opponent when he wants to demonstrate his superhuman status. Before he sets out he meets Laura Trevelyan, a spinster who makes a strong impression on him. During his journey into the desert he becomes transformed through her telepathic influence as they communicate in dreams and delirious visions. In the end, he is humbled through Christ-like suffering and death. Laura believes that his union with the desert of the interior implies a different kind of victory: "Voss did not die." He is still there, it is said, in the country, and always will be. "His legend will be written down, eventually, by those who have been troubled by it." Through their shared experience, she too has learnt that "Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind."



A union with the desert of the interior.

The epigraph of *Riders in the Chariot* is taken from William Blake and suggests connections with Ezekiel and Isaiah, the Chariot itself representing God as divine grace as well as destructive terror and judgement. The corresponding Christ-figure in *Riders in the Chariot* is Himmelfarb, a Jewish refugee from Germany. Like Voss, he is associated with the element of fire. The other illuminati are equally insignificant from a social point of view: Mary Hare, an elderly spinster; Ruth Godbold, a poor and hard-working housewife; and Alf Dubbo, a part-Aboriginal painter. Himmelfarb's death by crucifixion on Good Friday suggests that the capacity for evil in Australian suburbia is comparable to its realisation in Nazi Germany as well as in the Bible. Alf Dubbo expresses the unity of the four illuminati in his last painting, which represents the chariot of fire. "Their hands, which he painted open, had surrendered their suffering, but not yet received beatitude."

The central characters in *The Solid Mandala* are the elderly twins Arthur and Waldo Brown. Just like Voss and Laura, they are contrary beings, or rather contrasting aspects of the same being, contending but wholly interdependent. In *Flaws in the Glass,* White claims that the Brown brothers represent his two halves: "Waldo is myself at my coldest and worst." Mentally retarded Arthur, a Christ-figure like Himmelfarb, assumes the burden of suffering, responsibility and guilt to rescue that other part of himself, and when Waldo dies, Arthur proclaims himself guilty and ends up in an asylum.

The mystery of failure is a common denominator in the novels of the second, religious, phase. As stated in *Voss*: "The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming". Similarly, *Riders in the Chariot* suggests that "atonement is possible perhaps only where there has been failure."

THE THIRD PHASE

The Vivisector and The Eye of the Storm

The fact that almost five years elapsed between *The Solid Mandala* and *The Vivisector* indicates a change of emphasis. A single protagonist is at the centre of both novels in the third phase, and they are dominated by the image of the Eye, which is given a multidimensional function. The central character in *The Vivisector* is Hurtle Duffield, a painter whose artist's eye indicates his special instinct, enabling him to discern truth behind appearances. As the title suggests, the eye is also a knife, an instrument of torture. The artist's fellow-beings must try to protect themselves from "his third eye," used ruthlessly to vivisect vulgarity, pretentiousness and falsity.

One of his paintings represents the Mad Eye, signifying God as artist, vivisector and opponent. The dual aspect, creation and destruction, the artist as torturer and victim, divine truth as the goal of human will, and human will as subordinate to inevitability, pervades the whole novel. Causing his victims to suffer through his vivisecting eye, the artist must

also suffer, but to an even greater extent. Before he reaches illumination, typically through humiliation, his partiality to comparing the artist to God corresponds to Voss's blasphemous belief in his own divine capacity. Like the explorer, the artist approaches divinity only by becoming human.

Patrick White at his home in Centennial Park, Sydney.
The house figures in "The Eye of the Storm".

In *The Eye of the Storm,* the central character is Elizabeth Hunter, a dying old woman who is almost blind. She is greedy and cruel, and all her life she has consumed others. The title refers to a climactic moment in her life when she was left alone on an island and was caught in a tropical cyclone. The experience implied suffering and humiliation, closeness to death, but also a moment of incredible grace and stillness. Her dying implies a renewed search for that moment of grace, and her deathbed becomes the still centre in all the emotional storms that surround her. To her, as to Hurtle Duffield, the eye comes to stand for the core of reality, the centre of our true existence inside all the layers of appearance. In the end, both protagonists become obedient instruments of the Divine Eye. Their will is wholly concentrated on reaching the eye of truth and infinity, a process that ultimately implies the destruction of that same will. They both make the act of dying a work of art, and the two novels end on a positive note by combining the fundamentally human aspect with the concept of divinity.

The eye stands for the core of reality.

THE LAST PHASE

A Fringe of Leaves and The Twyborn Affair

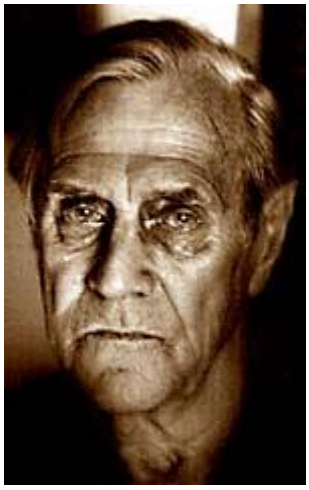
The two books representing the last phase deal with the efforts of the central characters to achieve self-discovery. But neither arrives at the kind of illumination that was typical of the earlier books. The religious

dimension is toned down in favour of social and psychological ones, and the imagery is less complex. *A Fringe of Leaves* is a historical novel in the sense that the story of its heroine, Ellen Roxburgh, is based on that of Eliza Fraser, who in 1836 was shipwrecked on a reef off the Queensland coast. She was the only survivor and spent six months, totally naked, with the aboriginal tribe that saved her. In the novel, the idea of nakedness suggested by the title is related to the general message. To the very last, Ellen Roxburgh defends her fringe of leaves, her "gesture to propriety." She does not, like Voss, become part of the Australian continent in a dying vision of the Southern Cross. Nor does she experience the blessing of sea, sky and land in the way Elizabeth Hunter did. Her return to England suggests that she is withdrawing, physically and spiritually, that she lacks the strength to go to such extremes as White's true questers do.

In the earlier novels the themes of homosexuality and transvestism are touched upon only incidentally. In *The Twyborn Affair* they come into focus for the first time. The central character, Eddie/Eudoxia/Eadith Twyborn, has a male body and a female consciousness, and in his search for identity he uses various external disguises, which keep even the reader in the dark. In one section he appears as the young wartime hero, in another he/she assumes the part of Mrs. Trist, the keeper of a fashionable London brothel. He fails to find fulfilment and true sexual identity either as a man or as a woman, but learns to value friendship and the importance of recognising the woman in man and the man in woman. The novel can be read as an enquiry into bisexuality, and sees androgyny as a symbol of wholeness.

An existential pessimist

Taken together, Patrick White's novels express no specific orthodoxy or conviction concerning existential, mystical or psychological matters, even though it is obvious that he has been inspired by Judeo-Christian mysticism and the philosophies of Eckhart, Schopenhauer, Jung, Buber, and Blake among others. In *Voss,* for instance, there is a fusion between the more traditional Christian and Dantean aspects, the mystical writings of Meister Eckhart, and the mythological beliefs of the Australian aborigines in a way that is typical of White's literary technique. In other books, too, we find layers of significance in which White uses various Australian associations combined with archetypal or literary European ones. His attitude is pessimistic in the sense that his successful questers are described as innocent simpletons, isolated or alienated, physically or mentally handicapped, whose final insight is achieved only through ordeals and humiliation. As figures like Voss and Hurtle Duffield show, the explorer/artist is necessarily a sufferer who, in his search for truth, causes others to suffer too. White, like his protagonists, asks himself: "Am I a destroyer, this face in the glass, which has spent a lifetime searching for what it believes, but can never prove, the truth? A face consumed by wondering whether truth can be the worst destroyer of all."



A face consumed by wondering.

Australia as the country of the mind exemplifies White's belief that "the state of simplicity and humanity is the only desirable one for artist or for man. While to reach it may be impossible, to attempt to do so is imperative." In his vocabulary "knowledge" is always unintellectual, irrational and intuitive. It refers to things you "do not know, but know", to use a wording which, with slight variations, occurs in all his books. He is scornful and sarcastic about the complacent attitudes in those who are satisfied with spiritually limited horizons, those who show no interest in "the mystery and poetry" beyond the Great Australian Emptiness. All his novels demonstrate how will-power, permanence, possessions and safety must be sacrificed. A journey of exploration is always a painful and solitary business through "that solitary land of the individual experience, in which no fellow footfall is ever heard", as it says in the first epigraph in *The Aunt's Story.*

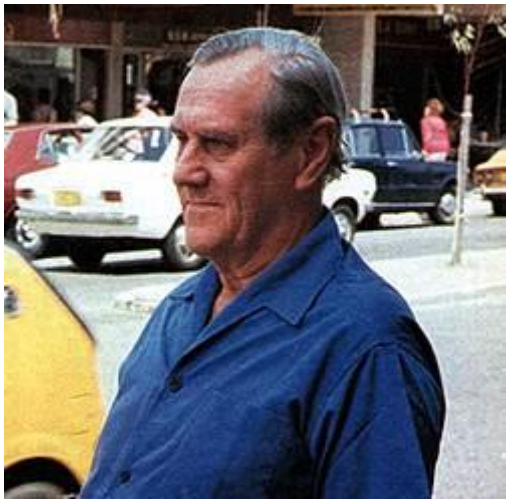
In this division into "the living and the dead", we are given to understand that there is no rational explanation of why some are granted the experience of unity and illumination, although it becomes obvious that they have a special relationship with the landscape. Thus the desert is said to belong to Voss merely "by right of vision." In many contexts there is a logical but unresolved tension between the spiritual seeker and the surrounding society. The recurring notions of suffering and loss of self-will indicate that the state in which his questers live is not compatible with an ordinary social existence. Without exception they are described as socially inhibited because of their otherness and the power of their individual vision. An effect of paradoxical elitism is achieved when their outward inferiority and spiritual superiority is portrayed against the background of mental mediocrity and materialism.

Voss's (and White's) Australia is a country of infinite distances, unimaginable age and mystery, and the grandeur of this mental landscape is set off against the complacent mediocrity of the masses huddled in the coastal cities. The reason why Patrick White has frequently been accused of elitism seems to be his fierce disdain of the commonplace, his horror of the average, and his contempt for the materialist attitudes of mundane suburbia that are manifest in all his writing. The desert not only assumes the unexpected and unusual

nostalgic quality previously mentioned, but at the same time retains its archetypal apocalyptic and daemonic properties. Traditionally a place where deep truths are revealed, it is at the same time a place of suffering and hardship. The enormous distances are used to illustrate the discrepancies between "aspiration and human nature" or between "earthbound flesh and aspiring spirit."

A mental exploration of the wilderness.

The desert in the centre of the Australian continent, conveniently shaped like a human heart, becomes the Interior with all its interpretative possibilities. The notion of mental exploration is linked with geographical imagery, particularly that of the desert/wilderness. Theodora Goodman becomes a timeless explorer in the wake of Odysseus, and the fact that Stan Parker is named after Stanley, the explorer becomes significant in the context. Voss travels into the desert in Leichhardt's footsteps and Himmelfarb, too, becomes a desert explorer in his last vision of a journey where "whole deserts were crossed." Towards the end of his life Hurtle Duffield, the painter, has to reassess what had up till then been the basis of his credo, and to face "the vastest desert he had ever set out to cross: not the faintest mirage to offer illusory solace." Even the old woman's death-bed in *The Eye of the Storm* is a symbolic desert in which she spent years "lying on this mattress of warm moist sand." Finally her desert, too, takes on its apocalyptic aspects, and she is granted "some miraculous dispensation to feel sand benign and soft between the toes." At last she herself becomes part of "this endlessness." Himmelfarb's death takes place in Sarsaparilla, White's hellish suburbia, which represents another kind of desert, "the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions", the recurrent target of White's satire.



The ultimate paradox is his pessimism as to the possibility of communicating what a single person can perceive.

To be able to appreciate Patrick White's consistent but complex structures and imagery the reader must be prepared to enter his symbolic Australia with the open-minded attitude of the explorer or the child. He or she must not demand verisimilitude or logical argumentation, as this is a territory that is usually reserved for poetry. The author's methods resemble those of a poet, musician or painter. In spite of the fact that White has an idealistic and passionate belief in the power of art and literature to change the world, he claims that he writes only for himself and has "never thought about readership." The ultimate paradox offered by this paradoxical writer is his pessimism as to the possibility of communicating what any single individual can perceive within his own experience. To thousands of readers, his writing is an entity which consistently explores and communicates his perception of reality. For them, it contradicts the view he expressed above.

Publication of this essay has been made possible through the coordination and assistance of Anders Hallengren.

* **Karin Hansson** (b. 1937) taught English and Swedish at secondary school level before starting her doctoral studies at Lund University. After completing her doctoral thesis, *The Warped Universe: A Study of Imagery and Structure in Seven Novels by Patrick White*, 1984, she worked as a teacher and researcher at Lund University and since 1991 at Blekinge Institute of Technology. She was appointed professor of English literature in 1998. She has published literary studies and books, particularly in the field of postcolonial literature, for example *Sheer Edge: Aspects of Identity in David Malouf's Writing*, 1991, and *The Unstable Manifold: Janet Frame's Challenge to Determinism*, 1996. She has been a member of the board of EASA (European Association for Studies on Australia). In 1997 she organized a conference on Joseph Conrad and edited the proceedings *Journeys, Myths and* 1998.

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Honours and Awards

White's numerous honours and awards include:

- 1941: Gold Medal of the Australian Literature Society for *Happy Valley*
- 1955: Gold Medal of the Australian Literature Society for *The Tree of Man*
- 1957: Miles Franklin Literary Award for *Voss*
- 1959: W. H. Smith Literary Award for *Voss*
- 1961: Miles Franklin Literary Award for *Riders in the Chariot*
- 1973: Nobel Prize in Literature
- 1973: Australian of the Year, National Australia Day Council
- 1975: Companion of the Order of Australia (AC, civil div

White was offered a knighthood in 1970, but declined it.

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Videos

[01] The paper knife: Patrick White and Katherine Mansfield
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbMnaWTJuq8 [48:13]
In this talk, Oliver Stead, Curator, Drawings, Paintings and Prints at the Alexander Turnbull Library, discusses the influence of Katherine Mansfield on the Australian writer, Patrick White. Although he was born in the UK, White grew up in Australia where he became a renowned novelist and playwright — the only Australian to have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

In 1961 White visited the Alexander Turnbull Library where an unusual link between White and Katherine Mansfield was first revealed. While visiting the Library, he also donated a silver and greenstone paper-knife that had belonged to Katherine Mansfield.

[02] Australian Literature 101: Patrick White: Voss
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_Fqs3ZEW1A [58:37]

[03] The Late Great: Patrick White
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4E0AsNTVNAY [49:02]
In the first of our Late Great series on Australian literary legends, David Marr, Kerry Walker and David Musgrave share their impressions and recollections of Nobel Laureate Patrick White. Hosted by Stephen Armstrong.

[04] Australian Literature 102: Patrick White: Riders in the Chariot

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMCH0Eg17jQ [56:36]
Novelist Andrea Goldsmith, in conversation with James Ley, explores the poetically vivid fictional universe of an internationally revered Australian literary icon – Patrick White – in Riders in the Chariot.

[05] Patrick White : Voss

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoPekwYgD_Q [57:42]

[06] Algorithmic Bias - Part 2 with Corey Patrick White

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmzU-wFw80M [50:54]
This is our most thought provoking interview yet.

We are joined by Corey Patrick White, a technologist and futurist and a Partner and Senior Vice President of Future Point of View. Corey helps leaders to look out into the future and anticipate how technology will impact their organizations and themselves. He is focused in the areas of machine learning, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and data privacy.

This episode is Part 2 of a special 2 part series where Corey White and The Leadership Project founder, Mick Spiers discuss issues about technology that all modern leaders need to know.

They explore the power (and dangers) of machine learning algorithms using social media and internet searches as key examples.

It is the responsibility of all leaders to ensure that technology is embraced for virtuous purposes; ensure that technology is not used for malicious intent; AND to ensure technology does not have unintended negative consequences on society.

Corey and Mick discuss how algorithmic bias impacts our daily lives and amplifies societal prejudices and bias making it increasingly more difficult to address unconscious bias, equity and equality in the world.

They discuss the considerations a leader needs when approaching how to ethically use technology for good and avoid unintended outcomes.

[07] Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape: Literature and Modernism lecture 2020

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1-Fbtna5PU [46:35]

I made this lecture for my students in the Literature and Modernism unit at Moansh University. Beckett came at the end of the course, after weeks on André Breton, Jean Cocteau, Leonora Carrington, Lu Xun, Eileen Chang, Ding Ling, and Jean Rhys. There is talk in university circles these days of the lecture format being dead. I think that's a naive view, like saying radio is dead because of the invention of television. So in addition to helping my students understand Beckett, I wanted to see what I could do with a 50 minute "lecture" slot under lockdown. I gave myself an afternoon and an evening to produce the finished product (which encoded overnight and was uploaded the next morning) from notes I had written

in a previous year. After receiving feedback from students who watched the "lecture", I'm more convinced than ever that "young people" today are more than capable of sitting for 50 minutes and consuming information, providing it is presented with some thoughtfulness. To abandon the 50 minute concentration span is, in my opinion, to concede too much territory to a troubling ideology that assumes a thinking elite will manage the attention of the rest of the population for their own ends. Teaching students to have their attention managed by other people is a problematic way to prepare them to thrive in a world in which attention is a commodity that is viciously and expertly hoarded. Teaching students to manage their own attention and to focus for extended periods is, perhaps, one of the most empowering life lessons we can teach during their time with us, providing them with a significant bulwark against being manipulated in the years beyond university.

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NSW Government

https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/heritage/blue-plaques/patrick-white

About Patrick White

Novelist, playwright, poet and political activist, Patrick White won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973 'for an epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature'.

He wrote some of his most acclaimed works while living with his life partner, Manoly Lascaris, at Dogwoods in Castle Hill, including *Voss* and *Riders in the chariot*, which each won the Miles Franklin Literary Award.

Max Dupain, 'Patrick White and Manoly Lascaris' 1987,

Formative years

Patrick Victor Martindale White was born to wealthy Australian parents in London in 1912. After returning to Australia, the family lived in the Sydney suburb of Elizabeth Bay. Paddy, as he was known during childhood, had a difficult relationship with his mother and was closer to his nurse, Lizzie Clarke.

From his early years Patrick struggled as an 'outsider', initially identifying more as an Englishman than an Australian and aware of his homosexuality at an early age. Writing was always at the core of his being, and he stressed that his work was an unavoidable 'affliction'. His severe asthma troubled him his entire life and meant he spent much time on his own.

On leaving school he worked as jackaroo, an experience that informed his first novel, *Happy valley*, which was published in 1939. After studying modern languages at Cambridge, he moved to London to write and moved in artistic circles.

Pivotal relationships

Patrick spent time in New York, where his work gained more success and he met his publisher, Ben Huebsch, who recognised his talent and played a vital role in the acceptance of his work.

Patrick served as a Royal Air Force operational intelligence officer during the Second World War. This profoundly changed his outlook and saw him yearning to return to Australia. During his service he met Manoly Lascaris, a Greek army officer who became his life partner. They decided to make their life together in Australia.

In 1948, Patrick bought a small farm in Castle Hill, where he and Manoly planted 4 dogwood trees, giving the property its name. They laboured planting crops and fruit trees and bred champion schnauzers. The farm was not a commercial success, but the experience provided Patrick with rich source material, which he drew on in his 1955 novel *The tree of man*.

Manoly with a litter of schnauzers, 1950s

Recognition

Patrick's novel *Voss* became the inaugural winner of the Miles Franklin literary award in 1957 and gave him the means to travel abroad. He reconciled with his mother, who had always promoted his work.

Returning to Castle Hill, he wrote his second Miles Franklin winner *Riders in the chariot* (1961), which addressed issues of alienation and difference. When his mother died in 1963, Patrick received a substantial legacy which enabled him to move to Martin Road, Centennial Park.

In 1973, Patrick became the first – and is still the only – Australian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The citation applauded his 'epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature'. The same year he was named Australian of the Year.

Activism and philanthropy

Patrick protested the Vietnam War, literary censorship and nuclear arms. He advocated for Aboriginal rights and gave to numerous charities. He was opposed to the British honours system, declining a knighthood in 1970, and also to the celebration of the bicentenary of British settlement in Australia. In 1975, he resigned his Order of Australia to protest the dismissal of the Whitlam government.

Patrick died at home in Centennial Park in 1990. He had written 12 novels, 3 short story collections, 8 plays and numerous poems.

Patrick's legacy as one of Australia's great writers lives on in the Patrick White Award, which he established with the money from his Nobel Prize. The award is given to authors who have made a significant but inadequately recognised contribution to Australian literature.

Also, visit these Web Pages for more information

01] https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/white-patrick-victor-paddy-14925
02] https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/patrick-white-wins-nobel-prize
03] https://lithub.com/on-patrick-white-australias-great-unread-novelist/
04] https://theconversation.com/patrick-white-was-the-first-australian-writer-to-win-the-nobel-prize-in-literature-50-years-later-is-he-still-being-read-214724
05] https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0925293/
06] https://www.penguin.com.au/books/patrick-white-9781742747774

10 Jun 1915

5 Apr 2005

Saul Bellow

Nobel Prize in Literature 1976

Born: 10 June 1915, Lachine, Quebec (now Montreal), Canada
Died: 5 April 2005, Brookline, MA, USA
Residence at the time of the award: USA
Prize motivation:

"for the human understanding and
subtle analysis of contemporary
culture that are combined in his work"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1976/bellow/facts/}

Nominated for the Nobel Prize

- Literature 1967, by Deutsches P.E.N.-Zentrum der Bundesrepublic
- Literature 1971, by Jara Ribnikar
- Literature 1972, by Elsie Patton
- Literature 1973, by Roger Asselineau
- Literature 1974, by Roger Asselineau
- Literature 1974, by Jara Ribnikar

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Links to other sites

[01] On Saul Bellow from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] Guide to the Saul Bellow Papers 1926-2015 at the University of Chicago Library

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Nobel Prize Lecture

December 12, 1976

I was a very contrary undergraduate more than 40 years ago. It was my habit to register for a course and then to do most of my reading in another field of study. So that when I should have been grinding away at "Money and Banking" I was reading the novels of Joseph Conrad. I have never had reason to regret this. Perhaps Conrad appealed to me because he was like an American – he was an uprooted Pole sailing exotic seas, speaking French and writing English with extraordinary power and beauty. Nothing could be more natural to me, the child of immigrants who grew up in one of Chicago's immigrant neighborhoods of course! – a Slav who was a British sea captain and knew his way around Marseilles and wrote an Oriental sort of English. But Conrad's *real* life had little oddity in it. His themes were straightforward – fidelity, command, the traditions of the sea, hierarchy, the fragile rules sailors follow when they are struck by a typhoon. He believed in the strength of these fragile-seeming rules, and in his art. His views on art were simply stated in the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. There he said that art was an attempt to render the highest justice to the visible universe: that it tried to find in that universe, in matter as well as in the facts of life, what was fundamental, enduring, essential. The writer's method of attaining the essential was different from that of the thinker or the scientist. These, said Conrad, knew the world by systematic examination. To begin with the artist had only himself; he descended within himself and in the lonely regions to which he descended, he found "the terms of his appeal". He appealed, said Conrad, "to that part of our being which is a gift, not an acquisition, to the capacity for delight and wonder… our sense of pity and pain, to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation – and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts… which binds together all humanity – the dead to the living and the living to the unborn."

This fervent statement was written some 80 years ago and we may want to take it with a few grains of contemporary salt. I belong to a generation of readers that knew the long list of noble or noble-sounding words, words like "invincible conviction" or "humanity" rejected by writers like Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway spoke for the soldiers who fought in the First World War under the inspiration of Woodrow Wilson and other rotund statesmen whose big words had to be measured against the frozen corpses of young men paving the trenches. Hemingway's youthful readers were convinced that the horrors of the 20th Century had sickened and killed humanistic beliefs with their deadly radiations. I told myself,

therefore, that Conrad's rhetoric must be resisted. But I never thought him mistaken. He spoke directly to me. The feeling individual appeared weak – he felt nothing but his own weakness. But if he accepted his weakness and his separateness and descended into himself intensifying his loneliness, he discovered his solidarity with other isolated creatures.

I feel no need now to sprinkle Conrad's sentences with skeptical salt. But there are writers for whom the Conradian novel – all novels of that sort – are gone forever. Finished. There is, for instance, M. Alain Robbe-Grillet, one of the leaders of French literature, a spokesman for "thingism" – *choseisme.* He writes that in great contemporary works, Sartre's *Nausea*, Camus' *The Stranger*, or Kafka's *The Castle,* there are no characters; you find in such books not individuals but – well, entities. "The novel of characters," he says, "belongs entirely in the past. It describes a period: that which marked the apogee of the individual." This is not necessarily an improvement; that Robbe-Grillet admits. But it is the truth. Individuals have been wiped out. "The present period is rather one of administrative numbers. The world's destiny has ceased, for us, to be identified with the rise and fall of certain men of certain families." He goes on to say that in the days of Balzac's bourgeoisie it was important to have a name and a character; character was a weapon in the struggle for survival and success. In that time, "It was something to have a face in a universe where personality represented both the means and the end of all exploration." But our world, he concludes, is more modest. It has renounced the omnipotence of the person. But it is more ambitious as well, "since it looks beyond. The exclusive cult of the 'human' has given way to a larger consciousness, one that is less anthropocentric." However, he comforts us, a new course and the promise of new discoveries lie before us.

On an occasion like this I have no appetite for polemics. We all know what it is to be tired of "characters". Human types have become false and boring. D.H. Lawrence put it early in this century that we human beings, our instincts damaged by Puritanism, no longer care for, were physically repulsive to one another. "The sympathetic heart is broken," he said. He went further, "We stink in each other's nostrils." Besides, in Europe the power of the classics has for centuries been so great that every country has its "identifiable personalities" derived from Molière, Racine, Dickens or Balzac. An awful phenomenon. Perhaps this is connected with the wonderful French saying. *"Sil y a un caractère, il est mauvais."* It leads one to think that the unoriginal human race tends to borrow what it needs from convenient sources, much as new cities have often been made out of the rubble of old ones. Then, too, the psychoanalytic conception of character is that it is an ugly rigid formation – something we must resign ourselves to, not a thing we can embrace with joy. Totalitarian ideologies, too, have attacked bourgeois individualism, sometimes identifying character with property. There is a hint of this in M. Robbe-Grillet's argument. Dislike of personality, bad masks, false being have had political results.

But I am interested here in the question of the artist's priorities. Is it necessary, or good, that he should begin with historical analysis, with

ideas or systems? Proust speaks in *Time Regained* of a growing preference among young and intelligent readers for works of an elevated analytical, moral or sociological tendency. He says that they prefer to Bergotte (the novelist in *Remembrance of Things Past*) writers who seem to them more profound. "But," says Proust, "from the moment that works of art are judged by reasoning, nothing is stable or certain, one can prove anything one likes."

The message of Robbe-Grillet is not new. It tells us that we must purge ourselves of bourgeois anthropocentricism and do the classy things that our advanced culture requires. Character? "Fifty years of disease, the death notice signed many times over by the serious essayists," says Robbe-Grillet, "yet nothing has managed to knock it off the pedestal on which the 19th century had placed it. It is a mummy now, but one still enthroned with the same phony majesty, among the values revered by traditional criticism."

The title of Robbe-Grillet's essay is *On Several Obsolete Notions.* I myself am tired of obsolete notions and of mummies of all kinds but I never tire of reading the master novelists. And what is one to do about the characters in their books? Is it necessary to discontinue the investigation of character? Can anything so vivid in them now be utterly dead? Can it be that human beings are at a dead end? Is individuality really so dependent on historical and cultural conditions? Can we accept the account of those conditions we are so "authoritatively" given? I suggest that it is not in the intrinsic interest of human beings but in these ideas and accounts that the problem lies. The staleness, the inadequacy of these repels us. To find the source of trouble we must look into our own heads.

The fact that the death notice of character "has been signed by the most serious essayists" means only that another group of mummies, the most respectable leaders of the intellectual community, has laid down the law. It amuses me that these serious essayists should be allowed to sign the death notices of literary forms. Should art follow culture? Something has gone wrong.

There is no reason why a novelist should not drop "character" if the strategy stimulates him. But it is nonsense to do it on the theoretical ground that the period which marked the apogee of the individual, and so on, has ended. We must not make bosses of our intellectuals. And we do them no good by letting them run the arts. Should they, when they read novels, find nothing in them but the endorsement of their own opinions? Are we here on earth to play such games?

Characters, Elizabeth Bowen once said, are not created by writers. They pre-exist and they have to be *found.* If we do not find them, if we fail to represent them, the fault is ours. It must be admitted, however, that finding them is not easy. The condition of human beings has perhaps never been more difficult to define. Those who tell us that we are in an

early stage of universal history must be right. We are being lavishly poured together and seem to be experiencing the anguish of new states of consciousness. In America many millions of people have in the last forty years received a "higher education" – in many cases a dubious blessing. In the upheavals of the Sixties we felt for the first time the effects of up-to-date teachings, concepts, sensitivities, the pervasiveness of psychological, pedagogical, political ideas.

Every year we see scores of books and articles which tell the Americans what a state they are in – which make intelligent or simpleminded or extravagant or lurid or demented statements. All reflect the crises we are in while telling us what we must do about them; these analysts are produced by the very disorder and confusion they prescribe for. It is as a writer that I am considering their extreme moral sensitivity, their desire for perfection, their intolerance of the defects of society, the touching, the comical boundlessness of their demands, their anxiety, their irritability, their sensitivity, their tendermindedness, their goodness, their convulsiveness, the recklessness with which they experiment with drugs and touch-therapies and bombs. The ex-Jesuit Malachi Martin in his book on the Church compares the modern American to Michelangelo's sculpture, *The Captive*. He sees "an unfinished struggle to emerge whole" from a block of matter. The American "captive" is beset in his struggle by "interpretations, admonitions, forewarnings and descriptions of himself by the self-appointed prophets, priests, judges and prefabricators of his travail," says Martin.

Let me take a little time to look more closely at this travail. In private life, disorder or near-panic. In families – for husbands, wives, parents, children – confusion; in civic behavior, in personal loyalities, in sexual practices (I will not recite the whole list; we are tired of hearing it) – further confusion. And with this private disorder goes public bewilderment. In the papers we read what used to amuse us in science fiction – *The New York Times* speaks of death rays and of Russian and American satellites at war in space. In the November Encounter so sober and responsible an economist as my colleague, Milton Friedman, declares that Great Britain by its public spending will soon go the way of poor countries like Chile. He is appalled by his own forecast. What – the source of that noble tradition of freedom and democratic rights that began with Magna Carta ending in dictatorship? "It is almost impossible for anyone brought up in that tradition to utter the word that Britain is in danger of losing freedom and democracy; and yet it is a fact!"

It is with these facts that knock us to the ground that we try to live. If I were debating with Professor Friedman I might ask him to take into account the resistance of institutions, the cultural differences between Great Britain and Chile, differences in national character and traditions, but my purpose is not to get into debates I can't win but to direct your attention to the terrible predictions we have to live with, the background of disorder, the visions of ruin.

You would think that one such article would be enough for a single number of a magazine but on another page of *Encounter* Professor Hugh

Seton-Watson discusses George Kennan's recent survey of American degeneracy and its dire meaning for the world. Describing America's failure, Kennan speaks of crime, urban decay, drug-addiction, pornography, frivolity, deteriorated educational standards and concludes that our immense power counts for nothing. We cannot lead the world and, undermined by sinfulness, we may not be able to defend ourselves. Professor Seton-Watson writes, "Nothing can defend a society if its upper 100,000 men and women, both the decision-makers and those who help to mould the thinking of the decision-makers, are resolved to capitulate." So much for the capitalist superpower. Now what about its ideological adversaries? I turn the pages of Encounter to a short study by Mr. George Watson, Lecturer in English at Cambridge, on the racialism of the Left. He tells us that Hyndman, the founder of the Social Democratic Federation, called the South African war the Jews' war; that the Webbs at times expressed racialist views (as did Ruskin, Carlyle and T. H. Huxley before them); he relates that Engels denounced the smaller Slav peoples of Eastern Europe as counter-revolutionary ethnic trash; and Mr. Watson in conclusion cites a public statement by Ulrike Meinhof of the West German "Red Army Faction" made at a judicial hearing in 1972 approving of "revolutionary extermination". For her, German anti-semitism of the Hitler period was essentially anticapitalist. "Auschwitz," she is quoted as saying, "meant that six million Jews were killed and thrown on the waste heap of Europe for what they were: money Jews (Geldjuden)."

I mention these racialists of the Left to show that for us there is no simple choice between the children of light and the children of darkness. Good and evil are not symmetrically distributed along political lines. But I have made my point; we stand open to all anxieties. The decline and fall of everything is our daily dread, we are agitated in private life and tormented by public questions.

And art and literature – what of them? Well, there is a violent uproar but we are not absolutely dominated by it. We are still able to think, to discriminate, and to feel. The purer, subtler, higher activities have not succumbed to fury or to nonsense. Not yet. Books continue to be written and read. It may be more difficult to reach the whirling mind of a modern reader but it is possible to cut through the noise and reach the quiet zone. In the quiet zone we may find that he is devoutly waiting for us. When complications increase, the desire for essentials increases too. The unending cycle of crises that began with the First World War has formed a kind of person, one who has lived through terrible, strange things, and in whom there is an observable shrinkage of prejudices, a casting off of disappointing ideologies, an ability to live with many kinds of madness, an immense desire for certain durable human goods – truth, for instance, or freedom, or wisdom. I don't think I am exaggerating; there is plenty of evidence for this. Disintegration? Well, yes. Much is disintegrating but we are experiencing also an odd kind of refining process. And this has been going on for a long time. Looking into Proust's *Time Regained* I find that he was clearly aware of it. His novel, describing French society during the Great War, tests the strength of his art. Without art, he insists, shirking no personal or collective horrors, we do not know ourselves or

anyone else. Only art penetrates what pride, passion, intelligence and habit erect on all sides – the seeming realities of this world. There is another reality, the genuine one, which we lose sight of. This other reality is always sending us hints, which, without art, we can't receive. Proust calls these hints our "true impressions." The true impressions, our persistent intuitions, will, without art, be hidden from us and we will be left with nothing but a "terminology for practical ends which we falsely call life." Tolstoy put the matter in much the same way. A book like his Ivan Ilyitch also describes these same "practical ends" which conceal both life and death from us. In his final sufferings *Ivan Ilyitch* becomes an individual, a "character", by tearing down the concealments, by seeing through the "practical ends."

Proust was still able to keep a balance between art and destruction, insisting that art was a necessity of life, a great independent reality, a magical power. But for a long time art has not been connected, as it was in the past, with the main enterprise. The historian Edgar Wind tells us in *Art and Anarchy* that Hegel long ago observed that art no longer engaged the central energies of man. These energies were now engaged by science – a "relentless spirit of rational inquiry." Art had moved to the margins. There it formed "a wide and splendidly varied horizon." In an age of science people still painted and wrote poetry but, said Hegel, however splendid the gods looked in modern works of art and whatever dignity and perfection we might find "in the images of God the Father and the Virgin Mary" it was of no use: we no longer bent our knees. It is a long time since the knees were bent in piety. Ingenuity, daring exploration, freshness of invention replaced the art of "direct relevance." The most significant achievement of this pure art, in Hegel's view, was that, freed from its former responsibilities, it was no longer "serious." Instead it raised the soul through the "serenity of form above any painful involvement in the limitations of reality." I don't know who would make such a claim today for an art that raises the soul above painful involvements with reality. Nor am I sure that at this moment, it is the spirit of rational inquiry in pure science that engages the central energies of man. The center seems (temporarily perhaps) to be filled up with the crises I have been describing.

There were European writers in the 19th Century who would not give up the connection of literature with the main human enterprise. The very suggestion would have shocked Tolstoy and Dostoevski. But in the West a separation between great artists and the general public took place. They developed a marked contempt for the average reader and the bourgeois mass. The best of them saw clearly enough what sort of civilization Europe had produced, brilliant but unstable, vulnerable, fated to be overtaken by catastrophe, the historian Erich Auerbach tells us. Some of these writers, he says, produced "strange and vaguely terrifying works, or shocked the public by paradoxical and extreme opinions. Many of them took no trouble to facilitate the understanding of what they wrote – whether out of contempt for the public, the cult of their own inspiration, or a certain tragic weakness which prevented them from being at once simple and true."

In the 20th Century, theirs is still the main influence, for despite a show of radicalism and innovation our contemporaries are really very conservative. They follow their 19th-Century leaders and hold to the old standard, interpreting history and society much as they were interpreted in the last century. What would writers do today if it would occur to them that literature might once again engage those "central energies", if they were to recognize that an immense desire had arisen for a return from the periphery, for what was simple and true?

Of course we can't come back to the center simply because we want to; but the fact that we are wanted might matter to us and the force of the crisis is so great that it may summon us back to such a center. But prescriptions are futile. One can't tell writers what to do. The imagination must find its own path. But one can fervently wish that they – that we – would come back from the periphery. We do not, we writers, represent mankind adequately. What account do Americans give of themselves, what accounts of them are given by psychologists, sociologists, historians, journalists, and writers? In a kind of contractual daylight they see themselves in the ways with which we are so desperately familiar. These images of contractual daylight, so boring to Robbe-Grillet and to me, originate in the contemporary world view: We put into our books the consumer, civil servant, football fan, lover, television viewer. And in the contractual daylight version their life is a kind of death. There is another life coming from an insistent sense of what we are which denies these daylight formulations and the false life – the death in life – they make for us. For it is false, and we know it, and our secret and incoherent resistance to it cannot stop, for that resistance arises from persistent intuitions. Perhaps humankind cannot bear too much reality, but neither can it bear too much unreality, too much abuse of the truth.

We do not think well of ourselves; we do not think amply about what we are. Our collective achievements have so greatly "exceeded" us that we "justify" ourselves by pointing to them. It is the jet plane in which we commonplace human beings have crossed the Atlantic in four hours that embodies such value as we can claim. Then we hear that this is closing time in the gardens of the West, that the end of our capitalist civilization is at hand. Some years ago Cyril Connolly wrote that we were about to undergo "a complete mutation, not merely to be defined as the collapse of the capitalist system, but such a sea-change in the nature of reality as could not have been envisaged by Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud." This means that we are not yet sufficiently shrunken; we must prepare to be smaller still. I am not sure whether this should be called intellectual analysis or analysis by an intellectual. The disasters are disasters. It would be worse than stupid to call them victories as some statesmen have tried to do. But I am drawing attention to the fact that there is in the intellectual community a sizeable inventory of attitudes that have become respectable – notions about society, human nature, class, politics, sex, about mind, about the physical universe, the evolution of life. Few writers, even among the best, have taken the trouble to re-examine these attitudes or orthodoxies. Such attitudes only glow more powerfully in Joyce or D.H. Lawrence than in the books of lesser men;

they are everywhere and no one challenges them seriously. Since the Twenties, how many novelists have taken a second look at D.H. Lawrence, or argued a different view of sexual potency or the effects of industrial civilization on the instincts? Literature has for nearly a century used the same stock of ideas, myths, strategies. "The most serious essayists of the last fifty years," says Robbe-Grillet. Yes, indeed. Essay after essay, book after book, confirm the most serious thoughts – Baudelairian, Nietzschean, Marxian, Psychoanalytic, etcetera, etcetera – of these most serious essayists. What Robbe-Grillet says about character can be said also about these ideas, maintaining all the usual things about mass society, dehumanization and the rest. How weary we are of them. How poorly they represent us. The pictures they offer no more resemble us than we resemble the reconstructed reptiles and other monsters in a museum of paleontology. We are much more limber, versatile, better articulated, there is much more to us, we all feel it.

What is at the center now? At the moment, neither art nor science but mankind determining, in confusion and obscurity, whether it will endure or go under. The whole species – everybody – has gotten into the act. At such a time it is essential to lighten ourselves, to dump encumbrances, including the encumbrances of education and all organized platitudes, to make judgments of our own, to perform acts of our own. Conrad was right to appeal to that part of our being which is a gift. We must hunt for that under the wreckage of many systems. The failure of those systems may bring a blessed and necessary release from formulations, from an over-defined and misleading consciousness. With increasing frequency I dismiss as merely respectable opinions I have long held – or thought I held – and try to discern what I have really lived by, and what others live by. As for Hegel's art freed from "seriousness" and glowing on the margins, raising the soul above painful involvement in the limitations of reality through the serenity of form, that can exist nowhere now, during this struggle for survival. However, it is not as though the people who engaged in this struggle had only a rudimentary humanity, without culture, and knew nothing of art. Our very vices, our mutilations, show how rich we are in thought and culture. How much we know. How much we even feel. The struggle that convulses us makes us want to simplify, to reconsider, to eliminate the tragic weakness which prevented writers – and readers – from being at once simple and true.

Writers are greatly respected. The intelligent public is wonderfully patient with them, continues to read them and endures disappointment after disappointment, waiting to hear from art what it does not hear from theology, philosophy, social theory, and what it cannot hear from pure science. Out of the struggle at the center has come an immense, painful longing for a broader, more flexible, fuller, more coherent, more comprehensive account of what we human beings are, who we are, and what this life is for. At the center humankind struggles with collective powers for its freedom, the individual struggles with dehumanization for the possession of his soul. If writers do not come again into the center it will not be because the center is pre-empted. It is not. They are free to enter. If they so wish.

The essence of our real condition, the complexity, the confusion, the pain of it is shown to us in glimpses, in what Proust and Tolstoy thought of as "true impressions". This essence reveals, and then conceals itself. When it goes away it leaves us again in doubt. But we never seem to lose our connection with the depths from which these glimpses come. The sense of our real powers, powers we seem to derive from the universe itself, also comes and goes. We are reluctant to talk about this because there is nothing we can prove, because our language is inadequate and because few people are willing to risk talking about it. They would have to say, "There is a spirit" and that is taboo. So almost everyone keeps quiet about it, although almost everyone is aware of it.

The value of literature lies in these intermittent "true impressions". A novel moves back and forth between the world of objects, of actions, of appearances, and that other world from which these "true impressions" come and which moves us to believe that the good we hang onto so tenaciously – in the face of evil, so obstinately – is no illusion.

No one who has spent years in the writing of novels can be unaware of this. The novel can't be compared to the epic, or to the monuments of poetic drama. But it is the best we can do just now. It is a sort of latter-day lean-to, a hovel in which the spirit takes shelter. A novel is balanced between a few true impressions and the multitude of false ones that make up most of what we call life. It tells us that for every human being there is a diversity of existences, that the single existence is itself an illusion in part, that these many existences signify something, tend to something, 10ulfil something; it promises us meaning, harmony and even justice. What Conrad said was true, art attempts to find in the universe, in matter as well as in the facts of life, what is fundamental, enduring, essential.

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Banquet speech

Saul Bellow's speech at the Nobel Banquet, December 10, 1976

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are not many things on which the world agrees but everyone I think acknowledges the importance of a Nobel Prize. I myself take most seriously the Nobel Committee's recognition of the highest excellence in several fields and I accept the honor of this award with profound gratitude.

I have no very distinct sense of personal achievement. I loved books and I wrote some. For some reason they were taken seriously. I am glad of that, of course. No one can bear to be ignored. I would, however, have been satisfied with a smaller measure of attention and praise. For when I am praised on all sides I worry a bit. I remember the scriptural warning, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." Universal agreement seems to open the door to dismissal. We know how often our contemporaries are mistaken. They are not invariably wrong, but it is not at all a bad idea to remember that they can't confer immortality on you. Immortality – a chilling thought. I feel that I have scarcely begun to master my trade.

But I need not worry too much that all men will speak well of me. The civilized community agrees that there is no higher distinction than the Nobel Prize but it agrees on little else, so I need not fear that the doom of universal approval is hanging over me. When I publish a book I am often soundly walloped by reviewers – a disagreeable but necessary corrective to selfinflation.

When the Committee's choice was announced and the press rushed at me (a terrifying phenomenon!) and asked how I felt about winning the Nobel Prize in literature, I said that the child in me (for despite appearances there is a child within) was delighted, the adult skeptical. Tonight is the child's night entirely. On Sunday I will have some earnest things to say from the pulpit. Sunday is the best day for dark reflections but the child's claim to this Friday night will not be disputed.

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Documentary

Saul Bellow, 1976 Nobel Laureate in Literature,
talks about his childhood in Chicago in the 1920's.

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1976/bellow/documentary/}

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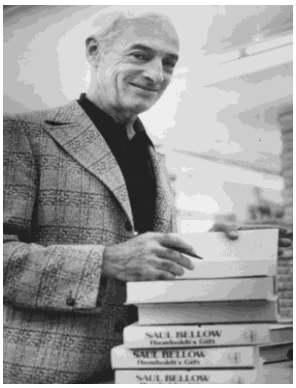
Photo Gallery

Saul Bellow, Nobel Laureate in Literature 1976.



Saul Bellow autographing his books.

Left-to-right: 1966 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry Robert S. Mulliken, 1966 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine Charles B. Huggins, 1976 Economics Laureate Milton Friedman and his wife Rose, and Saul Bellow with his wife Alexandra Ionescu Tulcea at a Nobel Ceremony at the University of Chicago, 1977.

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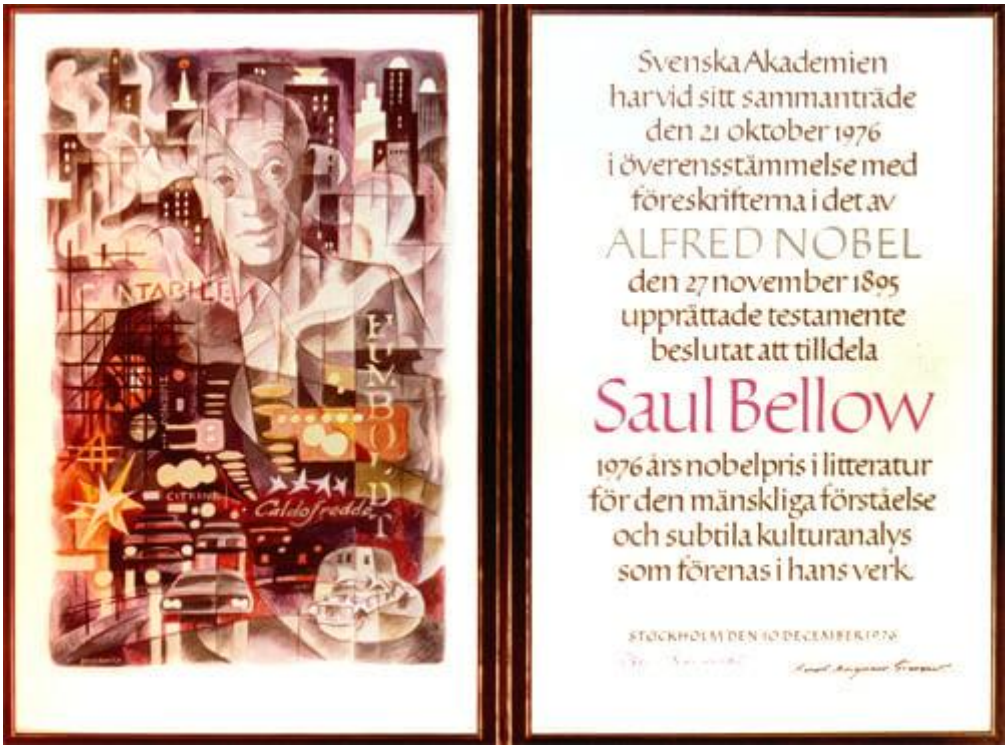
Nobel Diploma



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PROSE

Excerpt from *Herzog*

If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me, thought Moses Herzog.

Some people thought he was cracked and for a time he himself had doubted that he was all there. But now, though he still behaved oddly, he felt confident, cheerful, clairvoyant, and strong. He had fallen under a spell and was writing letters to everyone under the sun. He was so stirred by these letters that from the end of June he moved from place to place with a valise full of papers. He had carried this valise from New York to Martha's Vineyard, but returned from the Vineyard immediately; two days later he flew to Chicago, and from Chicago he went to a village in western Massachusetts. Hidden in the country, he wrote endlessly, fanatically, to the newspapers, to people in public life, to friends and relatives and at last to the dead, his own obscure dead, and finally the famous dead.

It was the peak of summer in the Berkshires. Herzog was alone in the big old house. Normally particular about food, he now ate Silvercup bread from the paper package, beans from the can, and American cheese. Now and then he picked raspberries in the overgrown garden, lifting up the thorny canes with absent-minded caution. As for sleep, he slept on a mattress without sheets – it was his abandoned marriage bed – or in the hammock, covered by his coat. Tall bearded grass and locust and maple seedlings surrounded him in the yard. When he opened his eyes in the night, the stars were near like spiritual bodies. Fires, of course; gases – minerals, heat, atoms, but eloquent at five in the morning to a man lying in a hammock, wrapped in his overcoat.

When some new thought gripped his heart he went to the kitchen, his headquarters, to write it down. The white paint was scaling from the brick walls and Herzog sometimes wiped mouse droppings from the table with his sleeve, calmly wondering why field mice should have such a passion for wax and paraffin. They made holes in paraffin-sealed preserves; they gnawed birthday candles down to the wicks. A rat chewed into a package of bread, leaving the shape of its body in the layers of slices. Herzog ate the other half of the loaf spread with jam. He could share with rats too.

All the while, one corner of his mind remained open to the external world. He heard the crows in the morning. Their harsh call was delicious. He heard the thrushes at dusk. At night there was a barn owl. When he walked in the garden, excited by a mental letter, he saw roses winding about the rain spout; or mulberries – birds gorging in the mulberry tree. The days were hot, the evenings flushed and dusty. He looked keenly at everything but he felt half blind.

His friend, his former friend, Valentine, and his wife, his ex-wife Madeleine, had spread the rumor that his sanity had collapsed. Was it true?

He was taking a turn around the empty house and saw the shadow of his face in a gray, webby window. He looked weirdly tranquil. A radiant line went from mid-forehead over his straight nose and full, silent lips.

Late in spring Herzog had been overcome by the need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends.

At that time he had been giving adult-education lectures in a New York night school. He was clear enough in April but by the end of May

he began to ramble. It became apparent to his students that they would never learn much about The Roots of Romanticism but that they would see and hear odd things. One after another, the academic formalities dropped away. Professor Herzog had the unconscious frankness of a man deeply preoccupied. And toward the end of the term there were long pauses in his lectures. He would stop, muttering "Excuse me," reaching inside his coat for his pen. The table creaking, he wrote on scraps of paper with a great pressure of eagerness in his hand; he was absorbed, his eyes darkly circled. His white face showed everything – everything. He was reasoning, arguing, he was suffering, he had thought of a brilliant alternative – he was wide-open, he was narrow; his eyes, his mouth made everything silently clear – longing, bigotry, bitter anger. One could see it all. The class waited three minutes, five minutes, utterly silent.

Excerpt from *Herzog* by Saul Bellow
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Excerpt selected by the Nobel Library of the Swedish Academy.

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Karl Ragnar Gierow, of the Swedish Academy

Translation from the Swedish text

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When Saul Bellow published his first book, the time had come for a change of climate and generation in American narrative art. The so-called hard-boiled style, with its virile air and choppy prose, had now slackened into an everyday routine, which was pounded out automatically; its rigid paucity of words left not only much unsaid but also most of it unfelt, unexperienced. Bellow's first work, *Dangling Man* (1944), was one of the signs portending that something else was at hand.

In Bellow's case emancipation from the previous ideal style took place in two stages. In the first he reached back to the kind of perception that had found its already classic guides in Maupassant, Henry James and Flaubert perhaps most of all. The masters he followed expressed themselves as restrainedly as those he turned his back on. But the emphasis was elsewhere. What gave a story its interest was not the dramatic, sometimes violent action but the light it shed over the protagonist's inner self. With that outlook the novel's heroes and heroines could be regarded, seen through and exposed, but not glorified. The anti-hero of the present was already on the way, and Bellow became one of those who took care of him.

Dangling Man, the man without a foothold, was thus a significant watchword to Bellow's writing and has to no small extent remained so. He pursued the line in his next novel, *The Victim* (1947) and, years later, with mature mastery in *Seize the Day* (1956). With its exemplary command of subject and form the last-mentioned novel has received the accolade as one of the classic works of our time.

But with the third story in this stylistically coherent suite, it is as if Bellow had turned back in order at last to complete something which he himself had already passed. With his second stage, the decisive step, he had already left this school behind him, whose disciplined form and enclosed structure gave no play to the resources of exuberant ideas, flashing irony, hilarious comedy and discerning compassion which he also knew he possessed and whose scope he must try out. The result was something

quite new, Bellow's own mixture of rich picaresque novel and subtle analysis of our culture, of entertaining adventure, drastic and tragic episodes in quick succession, interspersed with philosophic conversation with the reader-that too very entertaining-all developed by a commentator with a witty tongue and penetrating insight into the outer and inner complications that drive us to act or prevent us from acting and that can be called the dilemma of our age.

First in the new phase came *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953). The very wording of the title points straight to the picaresque, and the connexion is perhaps most strongly in evidence in this novel. But here Bellow had found his style, and the tone recurs in the following series of novels that form the bulk of his work: *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), *Herzog* (1964), *Mr Samler's Planet* (1970) and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975). The structure is apparently loose-jointed but for this very reason gives the author ample opportunity for descriptions of different societies; they have a rare vigour and stringency and a swarm of colourful, clearly defined characters against a background of carefully observed and depicted settings, whether it is the magnificent facades of Manhattan in front of the backyards of the slums and semi-slums, Chicago's impenetrable jungle of resourceful businessmen intimately intertwined with obliging criminal gangs, or the more literal jungle, in the depths of Africa, where the novel, *Henderson the Rain King*, the writer's most imaginative expedition, takes place. In a nutshell they are all stories on the move and, like the first book, are about a man with no foothold, but (and it is important to add this) a man who keeps on *trying to find* a foothold during his wanderings in our tottering world.

Even a few minutes' sketch of Bellow's many-sided writings should indicate where that foothold lies. It cannot be pointed out, as none of his protagonists reaches it. But during their escapades they are all on the run, not *from* something but *towards* something, a goal somewhere which will give them what they lack – firm ground under their feet. "I want, I want, I want!" Henderson exclaims, and sets off for an unknown continent. What his demands are he does not know; what he demands is to find out, and his own desire is the unknown continent. "A worthwhile fate," Augie March calls his goal. And Herzog, the restless seeker after truth, for his part tries out one phrasing after the other of what he means by "a worthwhile fate". At one point he says confidently that "the realm of facts and that of value are not eternally separated". The words are uttered in passing but are worth dwelling on, and if we think of them as coming from Bellow himself they are essential. Giving value a place side by side with palpable facts is, as regards literature, a definite departure from realism. As a philosophy it is a protest against the determinism that must make man unaccountable for his actions as well as inert or hostile to life, since it prevents him from feeling, choosing and acting himself. The awareness of a value, on the other hand, gives man freedom, thereby responsibility, thereby a desire for action and a faith in the future. That is why Bellow, never one to look through rose-coloured spectacles, is at heart an optimist. It is the light of that conviction which makes the facets of his writing sparkle. His "anti-heroes" are victims of constant disappointment, born to defeat without end, and Bellow (it cannot be over-emphasized) loves and is able to transform the fate they

find worthwhile into superb comedies. But they triumph nonetheless, they are heroes nonetheless, since they never give up the realm of values in which man becomes human. And, as Augie March says, anyone can become alive to this fact at any moment, however unfortunate he may be, "if he will be quiet and wait it out".

The realm of facts and that of value – the very combination of words is reminiscent of a work by the philosopher Wolfgang Köhler, professor first at Göttingen, then in Berlin, finally at Princeton, to which he fled from the Nazis. Köhler's book is called *The Place of Value in a World of Facts* and lent its name to an international Nobel symposium in Stockholm some years ago, at which a lecture was given by E. H. Gombrich, disciple and younger friend of Köhler. He told of the latter's last night in Berlin, before the flight could be carried out. Köhler spent the slow hours with like-minded friends, and while they waited, wondering if a patrol would clamp up the stairs at the last moment and pound on the door with rifle butts, they played chamber music. "Such is," Gombrich remarked, "the place of value in a world of facts".

The threatened position of value between obtrusive realities has not escaped Bellow; that is what he is always writing about. But he does not think that either mankind's conduct or the explosive development of the sciences betoken a world catastrophe. He is an optimist-in-spite-of-all, and thus also an opposition leader of human kindness. Truth must out, of course. But it is not always hostile. Facing the truth is not necessarily the same as braving death. "There may be truths on the side of life," he has said. "There may be some truths which are, after all, our friends in the universe."

In an interview once Bellow described something of what happens when he writes. Most of us, he supposed, have a primitive prompter or commentator within, who from earliest years has been telling us what the real world is. He himself has such a commentator in him; he has to prepare the ground for him and take notice of what he says. One is put in mind of another man who went out into the highways and byways with his questions, taking notice of his inner voice : Socrates and his daemon. These introspective listening demands seclusion. As Bellow himself puts it, "Art has something to do with the achievement of stillness in the midst of chaos. A stillness which characterizes prayer, too, and the eye of the storm." This was what prevailed when Köhler played chamber music on his last night in Berlin while, aware of imminent disaster, "being quiet and waiting it out". It is there that the value and dignity of life and mankind have their sole haven, ever storm-lashed, and it is from that stillness that Saul Bellow's work, borne on the whirlwind of disquiet, derives its inspiration and strength.

Dear Mr Bellow, it is my task and my great pleasure to convey to you the warm congratulations of the Swedish Academy and to ask you to receive from the hands of His Majesty the King the Nobel Prize for Literature of the year 1976.

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Swedish Academy
The Permanent Secretary

Press release

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1976

When **Saul Bellow** published his first book, the time had come for a change of climate and generation in American narrative art. The so-called hard-boiled style, with its virile air and choppy prose, had now slackened into an everyday routine, which was pounded out automatically; its rigid paucity of words left not only much unsaid, but also most of it unfelt, unexperienced. Bellow's first work, *Dangling Man* (1944), was one of the signs portending that something else was at hand.

In Bellow's case, emancipation from the previous ideal style took place in two stages. In the first, he reached back to the kind of perception that had found its already classic guides in Maupassant, Henry James, and Flaubert, perhaps, most of all. The masters he followed expressed themselves as restrainedly as those he turned his back on. But the emphasis was elsewhere. What gave a story its interest was not the dramatic, sometimes violent action, but the light it shed over the protagonist's inner self. With that outlook the novel's heroes and heroines could be regarded, seen through and exposed, but not glorified. The anti-hero of the present was already on the way, and Bellow became one of those who took care of him.

Dangling Man, the man without a foothold, was thus a significant watchword to Bellow's writing, and has, to no small extent, remained so. He pursued the line in his next novel, *The Victim* (1947) and, years later, with mature mastery in *Seize the Day* (1956). With its exemplary command of subject and form, this last novel has received the accolade as one of the classic works of our time.

But with the third story in this stylistically coherent suite, it is as if Bellow had turned back in order at last to complete something which he himself had already passed. With his second stage, the decisive step, he had already left this school behind him, whose disciplined form and enclosed structure gave no play to the resources of exhuberant ideas, flashing irony, hilarious comedy and burning compassion, which he also knew he possessed, and whose scope he must try out. The result was something quite new; Bellow's own mixture of rich picaresque novel and subtle analysis of our culture, of entertaining adventure, drastic and tragic episodes in quick succession interspersed with philosophic conversation with the reader – that too very entertaining – all developed by a commentator with a witty tongue and penetrating insight into the outer and inner complications that drive us to act, or prevent us from acting, and that can be called the dilemma of our age.

First in the new phase came *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953). The very wording of the title points straight to the picaresque, and the connection is perhaps most strongly in evidence in this novel. But here Bellow had found his style, and the tone recurs in the following series of novels that form the bulk of his work: *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), *Herzog* (1964), *Mr Sammler's Planet* (1970), and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975). The structure is apparently loose-jointed, but for this very reason gives the author ample opportunity for descriptions of different societies; they have a rare vigour and stringency, and a swarm of colourful, clearly-defined characters against a background of carefully observed and depicted settings, whether it is the magnificent façades of Manhattan in front of the backyards of the slums and semi-slums, Chicago's impenetrable jungle of unscrupulous businessmen intimately intertwined with efficient criminal gangs, or the more literal jungle in the depths of Africa, where the novel, *Henderson the Rain King,* the writer's most imaginative expedition takes place. In a nutshell, they are all stories on the move, and, like the first book, are about a man with no foothold. But (and it is important to add this) a man who keeps on trying to find a foothold during his wanderings in our tottering world, one who can never relinquish his faith that the value of life depends on its dignity, not on its success, and that the truth must triumph at last, simply because it demands everything except – triumphs. That is the way of thinking in which Saul

Bellow's "anti-heroes" have their foundation and acquire their lasting stature.

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Awards and Honors

- 1948 Guggenheim Fellowship
- 1954 National Book Award for Fiction
- 1965 National Book Award for Fiction
- 1971 National Book Award for Fiction
- 1976 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction
- 1976 Nobel Prize in Literature
- 1980 O. Henry Award
- 1986 St. Louis Literary Award from the Saint Louis University Library Associates
- 1988 National Medal of Arts
- 1989 PEN/Malamud Award
- 1989 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award[64]
- 1990 National Book Foundation's lifetime Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters
- 1997 National Jewish Book Award for *The Actual*
- 2010 Inducted into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame.
- 2024 United States Postal Service issued a three-ounce stamp commemorating Saul Bellow on February 6, 2024 in Chicago. The stamp features a portrait illustration by Joe Ciardiello.

Note:

Bellow is represented in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery with six portraits, including a photograph by Irving Penn, a painting by Sarah Yuster, a bust by Sara Miller, and drawings by Edward Sorel and Arthur Herschel Lidov. A copy of the Miller bust was installed at the Harold Washington Library Center in 1993. Bellow's papers are held at the library of the University of Chicago.

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Videos

01] Saul Bellow Interview

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hls050A0We0 [50:51]

02] I chat with Benjamin Markovits about trips, Saul Bellow and nominated novel, 'The Rest of Our Lives'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KW7hYGux1Vc [1:04:10]

Benjamin Markovits joins Suzi to talk about road trips, basketball and Saul Bellow, and his witty, bittersweet new novel, 'The Rest of Our Lives' about a man who goes on a voyage of self-discovery across the US as he contemplates leaving his marriage.

03] Melvyn Bragg talks to Saul Bellow about his book Humboldt's Gift and his career

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAJZqLexS9A [1:14:33]

04] COA Presents American Writers Saul Bellow March 2021

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqO18sHUasg [57:32]

05] Robert Adams on Saul Bellow's novel Herzog

https://www.tvo.org/video/robert-adams-on-saul-bellows-novel-herzog [01:25:00]

06] First Day of Issue Ceremony for Postage Stamp Honoring Saul Bellow

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RaWwyRL_d0 [35:14]

Author, University of Chicago professor, and Nobel laureate Saul Bellow was remembered at the unveiling of the new U.S. postage stamp held on February 6, 2024, at the Social Science Research Building Tea Room at the University of Chicago. Speakers included:

- Regina Aikens, ’98 (MBA), US Postal Service Manager Customer Relations IL 1
- Torsten Reimer, University Librarian and Dean of the University Library, The University of Chicago
- Gabriel Richardson Lear, Chair of the Committee on Social Thought, Professor of Philosophy and in the Committee on Social Thought, The University of Chicago
- David Wellbery, LeRoy T. and Margaret Deffenbaugh Carlson University Professor of Germanic Studies, the Committee on Social Thought, and in the College, The University of Chicago
- Sean Hargadon, US Postal Service Strategic Communications

The Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center at the University of Chicago Library is home to the Saul Bellow Papers, 1926-2015. Bellow was a prolific writer and educator and the recipient of many awards, among them the Pulitzer Prize, the National Medal of Arts, the National Book Award for Fiction and the Nobel Prize in Literature. His best-known novels

include The Adventures of Augie March, Henderson the Rain King, Herzog, Humboldt's Gift, Mr. Sammler's Planet, and Ravelstein. The Saul Bellow Papers contains personal ephemera; correspondence; materials related to the creation and publication of his writings; writings by others given to or collected by Bellow; writings about Bellow's life and work; administrative and teaching materials from the University of Chicago and Boston University; awards; photographs and audio recordings; artwork, broadsides, and posters.

07] Saul Bellow Reads from Humboldt's Gift and Henderson the Rain King

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNfPegZZbPI [1:08:55]

Saul Bellow reads from Humboldt's Gift and Henderson the Rain King. This audio is part of our Poetry Center's 75 at 75 series, where authors listen to a recording from our archive and write a personal response.

08] Zachary Leader, "The Life of Saul Bellow"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLNo3vyEuw4 [48:24]

In the first of a projected two-volume biography, Leader, Roehampton professor of English and author of The Life of Kingsley Amis, traces Bellow's life from his early years in Quebec through his coming-of-age in Chicago, his first three marriages, and the publications of Dangling Man, The Adventures of Augie March, and Herzog. Throughout, Leader draws on Bellow's correspondence and on his own interviews with Bellow's friends, relatives, and acquaintances for a fresh perspective on this great writer and his work.

09] Being America: Ranking Saul Bellow

https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=cPT_hack1OM [48:35]

10] Zachary Leader on Saul Bellow, with Martin Amis, Nov. 12, 2018

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2yle_kykN4 [1:04:49]

Zachary Leader in conversation with Martin Amis about Leader's The Life of Saul Bellow: Love and Strife, 1965 - 2005. Nov. 12, 2018, Elebash Recital Hall, the Graduate Center, CUNYm.

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UChicago Library

https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/about/news/behind-the-life-and-work-of-saul-bellow/

In the late 1950s, novelist Saul Bellow, X'39, found himself living in upstate New York in a well-worn house with Ralph Ellison, the acclaimed author of *Invisible Man*, as a roommate. A trove of correspondence remains from the two years that the literary odd couple lived under the same roof.

One letter, faded and yellowed, is dated May 15, 1959. It mostly details gutter repairs and the state of spring flowers. A postscript states a rake had been purchased. But Ellison slips in an aside on Bellow's acclaimed novel *Henderson the Rain King* that had just been published.

"Henderson, by the way, continues to raise the decibels at literary get togethers. You threw some real whiskey in the placid water of the literary well and I've been laughing my can off to see them try to deal with it."

Ellison's delight is one of countless glimpses into Bellow's life—30-plus years of which he spent as a University of Chicago professor—that emerges from the letters, personal writings and unpublished works recently made public in the Saul Bellow Papers at the University of Chicago Library.

"The University and the city of Chicago were the home of much of Bellow's writing, and no other location was more appropriate as a permanent location of his papers," said Daniel Meyer, director of the Library's Special Collections Research Center.

The opening of the archives, following extensive organization and cataloguing of the collection made possible by the financial support of Robert Nelson, AM'64, and Carolyn Nelson, AM'64, PhD'67, will provide new insights into Bellow, Chicago and 20th-century American literature. In addition to his correspondences, the archives contain ephemera—from Bellow's Rolodex to handmade art by his children–as well as photographs and audio recordings. But of real significance to scholars will be drafts of Bellow's published and unpublished works.

Bellow biographer Zachary Leader called the papers "a tremendous boon for people who are interested in Bellow's life and work. Unless you know the intermediate, unfinished works, you don't know how his ideas evolved, how his style evolved."

Finding the right note

Born in Montreal in 1915, Bellow was raised in Chicago, most notably the Humboldt Park neighborhood. He spent two years as an undergraduate at UChicago before completing his degree at Northwestern University.

In 1962, he returned to Chicago as a faculty member in the Committee on Social Thought and remained for more than three decades, winning nearly every major award in literature, including both the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize in 1976. Over those years, Bellow made regular deposits of his personal writings to the University's archives.

The process of cataloguing the papers was no easy task. Lead archivist Ashley Gosselar spent more than a year organizing the works that now span 254 boxes, extending nearly half the length of a football field.

"It is an enormous collection," Gosselar said. "The challenge of this project was in reuniting the different fragments of drafts. They were very scattered. That took some real sleuthing."

Making her job even more difficult was the fact that Bellow, who revised constantly, rarely if ever dated his work, but Gosselar said she discovered an appreciation for the artistry behind Bellow's tinkering.

"With Bellow's drafts, it's so clear that he was constantly reworking sentences, until he hit on the right note," Gosselar said. "It was kind of like listening to a jazz musician improvise. He wrote variation after variation of a sentence until it was the melody he wanted."

While the notes of the melody may have changed, the city of Chicago and the University proved a consistent theme of Bellow's oeuvre.

As a youth, Bellow discovered his love for books in the recesses of the Humboldt Park branch of the Chicago Public Library. "I am an American, Chicago born," begins *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), for which Bellow received the National Book Award. The Russian bathhouses that once lined Division Street inspired *Humboldt's Gift* (1975). And Bellow's friend and fellow Social Thought committee member Allan Bloom would become the basis for the titular character of his final novel, *Ravelstein* (2000).

'Thanks for your letter…'

Bellow kept to a strict writing schedule each morning, but his afternoons were spent at the University, where he taught graduate students in courses ranging from *Ulysses* to Nietzsche.

In the papers, one gets a sense for the soft spot Bellow seems to have had for academics and the generally curious, something Leader noticed in the course of his own research through the archives.

"He read all sorts of seemingly uninteresting correspondence," Leader said. "He had great patience if he detected something intelligent. If the ignorant person seemed to have a good heart, he'd answer them."

In one letter, a student who describes himself as a 35-year-old computer engineer, includes a copy of a college essay he wrote on Bellow.

"Thanks for your letter," Bellow replied. "I found the T.S. Eliot parallel full of charm, but also quite baffling. It was a good try nevertheless and I much enjoyed it. Sincerely yours, Saul Bellow."

Of course, there are also correspondences with luminaries from literature and beyond, including the likes of Philip Roth, AM'55, and John F. Kennedy. While some, like the Ellison letters, are cordial, others reveal awe in writing to the famed novelist.

The author Dave Eggers writes of drawing strength from Bellow's novels while working on his own first work of fiction. "I just wanted you to know that every single sentence of yours makes me believe," Eggers writes.

But among the multitudes writing him, one letter from a 17-year-old fan speaks volume to Bellow's impact on readers. In the letter, a fan tells Bellow of her initial dislike of *Herzog,* but her critique soon turns to praise.

"Tonight, I am on page 135 and figured that it was about time I wrote you a fan letter of sorts because I am no longer bored or apathetic about reading it," she writes. "It's damn good writing. I feel it inside of me. My insides say yes to it."

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Chicago Public Library

https://www.chipublib.org/saul-bellow-biography/

Saul Bellow was born in Lachine, Montreal, Canada in 1915, the fourth child of Russian émigrés. When Bellow was 9, the family relocated to Chicago and settled in a Humboldt Park tenement. While his father and siblings were less interested in studies than in business, Bellow attended school and spent his free hours in public libraries studying, reading books and trying his hand at writing fiction. He was fluent in English, French, Yiddish and Hebrew. Graduating from Tuley High School in 1933, he then enrolled at the University of Chicago to study literature. In 1935, Bellow transferred to Northwestern University, where he graduated with honors and earned bachelor's degrees in anthropology and sociology. After a brief attempt at graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, Bellow ended his academic career and returned to Chicago to focus on writing fiction.

Commissioned by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Writers' Project, Bellow composed biographies of Midwestern authors. He participated in Mortimer Adler's "Great Books" program for *Encyclopedia Britannica* and taught classes at the Pestalozzi-Froebel

Teachers' College. In 1941, Bellow published his first story, "Two Morning Monologues," in *Partisan Review*.

Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man* (1944), depicts a young man embittered and enlightened by World War II. His second and equally dark novel, *The Victim* (1947), explores the destructive nature of anti-Semitism. For this novel, Bellow was awarded the first of two Guggenheim Fellowships. (He would earn a second in 1955.) Six years later, Bellow published the semiautobiographical *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953). Aside from garnering Bellow a National Book Award, *Augie March* is notable both for its memorable opening paragraph and as a turning point in the author's career. While the bleak topics of his first two novels are treated with marked gravity, Bellow applies to *Augie March* the spirited, comic narrative style with which he would be associated for years to come. His classic novella, *Seize the Day* (1956), portrays an absurd protagonist whose comic misadventures lead to epiphany in a Chicago subway. *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) is a huge, wildly comic romp and the novel that Bellow himself claimed to be his personal favorite.

In 1962, Bellow accepted a professorship at the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, a position he would hold for more than 30 years. During the 1960s and 1970s, Bellow's narratives would take another notable turn. *Herzog* (1964), *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975) are marked by complex characters and themes of reflection, guilt and social dissatisfaction. In 1965, Bellow won the International Literary Prize for *Herzog*, becoming the first American to receive the honor. Bellow would publish numerous additional novels, stories and collections before his death in 2005, including his final novel, *Ravelstein* (2000). Published when Bellow was 85 years old, *Ravelstein* is a fictional memoir based on longtime friend and colleague Alan Bloom and received widespread critical acclaim.

Bellow's fiction has been featured in countless periodicals, including *Harper's Bazaar*, *The New Yorker* and *Esquire*. His literary criticism has appeared in *The New Republic* and the *New York Times Book Review*, among others.

In his long and lauded career, Saul Bellow received many honors in the United States and abroad. He is the only author to have won the National Book Award three times. In 1968, he was given the Croix de Chevalier des Arts et Lettres by France. That same year, Bellow received the B'nai B'rith Jewish Heritage Award. In 1976, Bellow won the Pulitzer Prize for *Humboldt's Gift* and the coveted Nobel Prize in Literature. In 1977, he was selected by the National Endowment for the Humanities for the Jefferson Lecture. In 1988, Congress awarded him the National Medal of Arts.

Bellow's body of work, honors and critical acclaim tell the author's place in the canon of American literature. Not only one of Chicago's most remarkable literary icons, Saul Bellow is widely regarded among the greatest authors of the 20th century.

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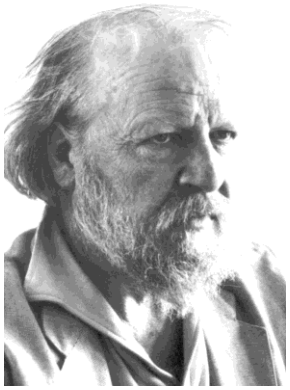
19 Sep 1911



19 Jun 1993

William Golding

Nobel Prize in Literature 1983

Born: 19 September 1911, Newquay, United Kingdom
Died: 19 June 1993, Perranarworthal, United Kingdom
Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom
Prize motivation:

"for his novels which, with the perspicuity of realistic narrative art and the diversity and universality of myth, illuminate the human condition in the world of today"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1983/golding/facts/}

Links to other sites

(01) On William Golding from Pegasos Author's Calendar
(02) The homepage of William Golding Limited

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Prize Presentation

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1983/golding/prize-presentation/}

Watch a video clip of the 1983 Nobel Laureate in Literature, William Golding, receiving his Nobel Prize medal and diploma during the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony at the Concert Hall in Stockholm, Sweden, on 10 December 1983.

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Professor Lars Gyllensten, of the Swedish Academy

Translation from the Swedish text

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

William Golding's first novel – *Lord of the Flies*, 1954 – rapidly became a world success and has so remained. It has reached readers who can be numbered in tens of millions. In other words, the book was a bestseller, in a way that is usually granted only to adventure stories, light reading and children's books. The same goes for several of his later novels.

The reason is simple. These books are very entertaining and exciting. They can be read with pleasure and profit without the need to make much effort with learning or acumen. But they have also aroused an unusually great interest in scholars, writers and other interpreters, who have sought and found deep strata of ambiguity and complication in Golding's work. In those who use the tools of narration and linguistic art they have incited to thinking, discovery and creation of their own, in order to explore the world we live in and to settle down in it. In this respect William Golding can perhaps be compared to the American Herman Melville, whose works are full of equivocal profundity as well as fascinating adventure. In fact the resemblance extends farther than that. Golding has a very keen sight and sharp pen when it comes to the power of evil and baseness in human beings. He often chooses his themes and the framework for his stories from the world of the sea or from other challenging situations in which odd people are tempted to reach beyond their limits, thereby being bared to the very marrow. His stories usually have a fairly schematic drama, almost an anecdote, as skeleton. He then covers this with a richly varied and spicy flesh of colourful characters and surprising events.

It is the pattern of myth that we find in his manner of writing.

A very few basic experiences and basic conflicts of a deeply general nature underlie all his work as motive power. In one of his essays he describes how as a young man he took an optimistic view of existence. He believed that man would be able to perfect himself by improving society and eventually doing away with all social evil. His optimism was akin to that of other utopians, for instance H.G. Wells. The Second

World War changed his outlook. He discovered what one human being is really able to do to another. And it was not a question of headhunters in New Guinea or primitive tribes in the Amazon region – he writes. They were atrocities committed with cold professional skill by well-educated and cultured people – doctors, lawyers and those with a long tradition of high civilization behind them. They carried out their crimes against their own equals. He writes:

"I must say that anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as a bee produces honey, must have been blind or wrong in the head."

Golding inveighs against those who think that it is the political or other systems that create evil. Evil springs from the depths of man himself – it is the wickedness in human beings that creates the evil systems or that changes what from the beginning is, or could be, good into something iniquitous and destructive.

There is a mighty religious dimension in William Golding's conception of the world, though hardly Christian in the ordinary sense. He seems to believe in a kind of Fall. Perhaps rather one should say that he works with the myth of a Fall. In some of his stories, chiefly the novel *The Inheritors*, 1955, we find a dream of an original state of innocence in the history of mankind. The Fall came with the motive power of a new species. The aggressive intelligence, the power-hungry self-assertion and the overweening individualism are the source of evil and violence – individual as well as social violence. But these qualities and incentives are also innate in man as a created being. They are therefore inseparably a part of his character and make themselves felt when he gives full expression to himself and forms his societies and his private destiny.

We come across this tragic drama in many different ways in William Golding's novels. In *Lord of the Flies* a group of young boys are isolated on a desert island. Soon a kind of primitive society takes shape and is split into warring factions, one marked by decency and willingness to co-operate, the other by worship of force, lust for power and violence. The novel *Pincher Martin*, 1956, depicts how the main character, the narrator, is drowning. In his passionate absorption in himself he seems for a time to get the better of death. He does so by recounting his life, a life full of ruthless egoism and cruelty to others, a miserable life yet it was his and on no account does he want to lose it. He, the dead man, tries to make the rock to which he is clinging into a picture of himself. It is a weird ghost story, a fable of a will to live without shame or moderation.

In the novel *Rites of Passage*, 1980, the drama is enacted in the microcosm that the author arranges on a ship of the line at the beginning of the 19th Century. The book gives a cruel and drastic description of social barriers and aggressions on this ship, with an underlying black comedy and a masterly command of the characters' various linguistic roles. The scapegoat – one of many in Golding's works – is a priest who, naively trusting in the authority of his office, tries to assert his own dignity. He is subjected to outrages, each worse than the last, himself taking part in them, and ends up in such a desperate situation that he dies of shame.

All is not evil in the world of mankind, however, and all is not black in William Golding's imagined world. According to him, man has two characteristics – the ability to murder is one, belief in God the other. Innocence is not entirely lost. There is a striving away from evil. This striving often goes astray in self-assertion and illusionism. But it is there nevertheless and is allied with something that is not merely

human. In the novel *The Spire*, 1964, this striving is imbodied in a story about the building of a medieval cathedral. The builder is a priest who believes he has been ordered by God to build a spire that defies all reasonable calculations and measurements. His striving is both good and bad, containing the most complex reasons-humility and conviction but also arrogance, wilfulness and furtive sexual motives.

William Golding's novels and stories are not only sombre moralities and dark myths about evil and about treacherous, destructive forces. As already mentioned they are also colourful tales of adventure which can be read as such, full of narrative joy, inventiveness and excitement. In addition there are plentiful streaks of humour, biting irony, comedy and drastic jesting. There is a vitality which breaks through what is tragic and misanthropic, frightening in fact. A vitality, a vigour, which is infectious owing to its strength and intractability and to the paradoxical freedom it possesses as against what is related. His fabled world is tragic and pathetic, yet not overwhelming and depressing. There is a life which is mightier than life's conditions.

Dear Mr Golding,

In interviews and essays you have sometimes made fun of commentators who have tried to summarize what you have written in a formula and fit your outlook on life into some pattern or other. That is impossible – simply because if it were possible there would be no reason for you to write your books and – as I hope – to continue to write. So I have not tried anything like that. I have only given a few reflexions, a few reactions to some of your novels – in the hope of conveying to those who might not yet be familiar with your works a glimpse of the fascination and stimulation which they afford. My second task is to express the warm congratulations of the Swedish Academy and to ask you to receive from the hands of His Majesty the King this year's Nobel Prize for Literature.

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Nobel Prize Lecture

Nobel Lecture 7 December, 1983

Those of you who have some knowledge of your present speaker as revealed by the loftier-minded section of the British Press will be resigning yourselves to a half hour of unrelieved gloom. Indeed, your first view of me, white bearded and ancient, may have turned that gloom into profound dark; dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon, irrecoverably dark, total eclipse. But the case is not as hard as that. I am among the older of the Nobel Laureates and therefore might well be excused a touch of – let me whisper the word – frivolity. Pray do not misunderstand me. I have no dancing girls, alas. I shall not sing to you or juggle or clown –

or shall I juggle? I wonder! How can a man who has been defined as a pessimist indulge in anything as frivolous as juggling?

You see it is hard enough at any age to address so learned a gathering as this. The very thought induces a certain solemnity. Then again, what about the dignity of age? There is, they say, no fool like an old fool.

Well, there is no fool like a middle-aged fool either. Twenty-five years ago I accepted the label 'pessimist' thoughtlessly without realising that it was going to be tied to my tail, as it were, in something the way that, to take an example from another art, Rachmaninoff's famous Prelude in C sharp minor was tied to him. No audience would allow him off the concert platform until he played it. Similarly critics have dug into my books until they could come up with something that looked hopeless. I can't think why. I don't feel hopeless myself. Indeed I tried to reverse the process by explaining myself. Under some critical interrogation I named myself a universal pessimist but a cosmic optimist. I should have thought that anyone with an ear for language would understand that I was allowing more connotation than denotation to the word 'cosmic' though in derivation universal and cosmic mean the same thing. I meant, of course, that when I consider a universe which the scientist constructs by a set of rules which stipulate that this construct must be repeatable and identical, then I am a pessimist and bow down before the great god Entropy. I am optimistic when I consider the spiritual dimension which the scientist's discipline forces him to ignore. So worldwide is the fame of the Nobel Prize that people have taken to quoting from my works and I do not see why I should not join in this fashionable pastime. Twenty years ago I tried to put the difference between the two kinds of experience in the mind of one of my characters, and made a mess of it. He was in prison.

"All day long the trains run on rails. Eclipses are predictable. Penicillin cures pneumonia and the atom splits to order. All day long year in year out the daylight explanation drives back the mystery and reveals a reality usable, understandable and detached. The scalpel and the microscope fail. The oscilloscope moves closer to behaviour.

"But then, all day long action is weighed in the balance and found not opportune nor fortunate nor ill-advised but good or evil. For this mode which we call the spirit breathes through the universe and does not touch it: touches only the dark things held prisoner, incommunicado, touches, judges, sentences and passes on. Both worlds are real. There is no bridge."

What amuses me is the thought that of course there is a bridge and that if anything it has been thrust out from the side which least expected it, and thrust out since those words were written. For we know now, that the universe had a beginning. (Indeed, as an aside I might say we always did know. I offer you a simple proof and forbid you to examine it. If there was no beginning then infinite time has already passed and we could

never have got to the moment where we are.) We also know or it is at least scientifically respectable to postulate that at the centre of a black hole the laws of nature no longer apply. Since most scientists are just a bit religious and most religious are seldom wholly unscientific we find humanity in a comical position. His scientific intellect believes in the possibility of miracles inside a black hole while his religious intellect believes in them outside it. Both, in fact, now believe in miracles, credimus quia absurdum est. Glory be to God in the highest. You will get no reductive pessimism from me.

A greater danger facing you is that an ancient schoolmaster may be carried away and forget he is not addressing a class of pupils. A man in his seventies may be tempted to think he has seen it all and knows it all. He may think that mere length of years is a guarantee of wisdom and a permit for the issuing of admonition and advice. Poor young Shakespeare and Beethoven, he thinks, dead in their youth at a mere fifty-two or three! What could young fellows such as that know about anything? But at midnight perhaps, when the clock strikes and another year has passed he may occasionally brood on the disadvantages of age rather than the advantages. He may regard more thoughtfully a sentence which has been called the poetry of the fact, a sentence that one of those young fellows stumbled across accidentally, as it were, since he was never old enough to have worked the thing out through living. "Men," he wrote, "must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither." Such a consideration may modify the essential jollity of an old man's nature. Is the old man right to be happy? Is there not something unbecoming in his cheerful view of his own end? The words of another English poet seem to rebuke him.

King David and King Solomon
Led merry, merry lives,
With many, many lady friends
And many, many wives;
But when old age crept over them,
With many, many qualms,
King Solomon wrote the Proverbs
And King David wrote the Psalms.

Powerful stuff that, there's no doubt about it. But there are two views of the matter; and since I have quoted to you some of my prose which are generally regarded as poetic, I will not quote to you some of my Goon or McGonagall poetry which may well be regarded as prosaic.

Sophocles the eminent Athenian
Gave as his final opinion
That death of love in the breast
Was like escape from a wild beast.

What better word could you get?
He was eighty when he said that.
But Ninon de L'Enclos
When asked the same question said, no
She was uncommonly matey
At eighty.

Evidently age need not wither us nor custom stale our infinite variety. Let us be, for a while, not serious but considerate. I myself face another danger. I do not speak in a small tribal language as it might be one of the six hundred languages of Nigeria. Of course the value of any language is incalculable. Your Laureate of 1979, the Greek poet Elytis, made quite clear that the relative value of works of literature is not to be decided by counting heads. It is, I think, the greatest tribute one can pay your committees that they have consistently sought for value in a work without heeding how many people can or cannot read it. The young John Keats spoke of Greek poets who "died content on pleasant sward, leaving great verse unto a little clan". Indeed and indeed, small can be beautiful. To quote yet another poet – prose writer though I am you will have begun to realise where my heart is – Ben Jonson said:

"It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be,
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald and sere:
A lily of a day,
Is fairer far in May,
Although it fall and die that night;
It was the plant and flower of light.
In small proportions we just beauties see,
And in short measures, life may perfect be."

My own language, English, I believe to have a store of poets, of writers that need not fear comparison with those of any other language, ancient or modern. But today that language may suffer from too wide a use rather than too narrow a one – may be an oak rather than a lily. It spreads right round the world as the medium of advertisement, navigation, science, negotiation, conference. A hundred political parties have it daily in their mouths. Perhaps a language subjected to such strains as that may become, here and there, just a little thin. In English a man may think he is addressing a small, distinguished audience, or his family or his friends, perhaps; he is brooding aloud or talking in his sleep. Later he finds that without meaning to he has been addressing a large segment of the world. That is a daunting thought. It is true that this year, surrounded and outnumbered as I am by American laureates, I take a quiet pleasure in the consideration that though variants of my mother tongue may be spoken by a greater number of people than are to be found in an island off the West coast of Europe nevertheless they are speaking dialects of what is still centrally English. Personally I cannot tell

whether those many dialects are being rendered mutually incomprehensible by distance faster than they are being unified by television and satellites; but at the moment the English writer faces immediate comprehension or partial comprehension by a good part of a billion people. His critics are limited in number only by the number of the people who can read his work. Nor can he escape from knowing the worst. No matter how obscure the publication that has disembowelled him, some kind correspondent – let us call him "X" – will send the article along together with an indignant assurance that he, "X", does not agree with a word of it. I think apprehensively of the mark I present, once A Moving Target but now, surely a fixed one, before the serried ranks of those who can shoot at me if they choose. Even my most famous and distinguished fellow laureate and fellow countryman, Winston Churchill, did not escape. A critic remarked with acid wit of his getting the award, "Was it for his poetry or his prose?" Indeed it was considerations such as these which have given me, I suppose, more difficulty in conceiving, let alone writing this lecture than any piece of comparable length since those distant days when I wrote set essays on set subjects at school. The only difference I can find is that today I write at a larger desk and the marks I shall get for my performance will be more widely reported.

Now when, you may say, is the man going to say something about the subject which is alleged to be his own? He should be talking about the novel! Well, I will for a while, but only for a while, and as it were, tangentially. The truth is that though each of the subjects for which the prizes are awarded has its own and unique importance, none can exist wholly to itself. Even the novel, if it climbs into an ivory tower, will find no audience except those with ivory towers of their own. I used to think that the outlook for the novel was poor. Let me quote myself again. I speak of boys growing up – not exceptional boy, but average boy.

> "Boys do not evaluate a book. They divide books into categories. There are sexy books, war books, westerns, travel books, science fiction. A boy will accept anything from a section he knows rather than risk another sort. He has to have the label on the bottle to know it is the mixture as before. You must put his detective story in a green paperback or he may suffer the hardship of reading a book in which nobody is murdered at all; – I am thinking of the plodders, the amiable majority of us, not particularly intelligent or gifted; well-disposed, but left high and dry among a mass of undigested facts with their scraps of saleable technology. What chance has literature of competing with the defined categories of entertainment which are laid on for them at every

> hour of the day? I do not see how literature is to be for them anything but simple, repetitive and a stop-gap for when there are no westerns on the telly. They will have a far less brutish life than their Nineteenth-Century ancestors, no doubt. They will believe less and fear less. But just as bad money drives out good, so inferior culture drives out superior. With any capacity to make value judgements vitiated or undeveloped, what mass future is there, then, for poetry, for belles-lettres, for real fearlessness in the theatre, for the novel which tries to look at life anew – in a word, for intransigence?"

I wrote that some twenty years ago I believe and the process as far as the novel is concerned has developed but not improved. The categories are more and more defined. Competition from other media is fiercer still. Well, after all the novel has no build – it claims on immortality.

"Story" of course is a different matter. We like to hear of succession of events and as an inspection of our press will demonstrate have only a marginal interest in whether the succession of events is minutely true or not. Like the late Mr. Sam Goldwyn who wanted a story which began with an earthquake and worked up to a climax, we like a good lead in but have most pleasure in a succession of events with a satisfactory end-point. Most simply and directly – when children holler and yell because of some infant tragedy or tedium, at once when we take them on our knee and begin shouting if necessary – "once upon a time" they fall silent and attentive. Story will always be with us. But story in a physical book, in a sentence what the West means by "a novel" – what of that? Certainly, if the form fails let it go. We have enough complications in life, in art, in literature without preserving dead forms fossilised, without cluttering ourselves with Byzantine sterilities. Yes, in that case, let the novel go. But what goes with it? Surely something of profound importance to the human spirit! A novel ensures that we can look before and after, take action at whatever pace we choose, read again and again, skip and go back. The story in a book is humble and serviceable, available, friendly, is not switched on and off but taken up and put down, lasts a lifetime.

Put simply the novel stands between us and the hardening concept of statistical man. There is no other medium in which we can live for so long and so intimately with a character. That is the service a novel renders. It performs no less an act than the rescue and the preservation of the individuality and dignity of the single being, be it man, woman or child. No other art, I claim, can so thread in and out of a single mind and body, so live another life. It does ensure that at the very least a human being shall be seen to be more than just one billionth of one billion.

I spoke of the ivory tower and the unique importance of each of our studies. Now I must add, having said my bit about the novel – that those studies converge, literature with the rest. Put bluntly, we face two problems – either we blow ourselves off the face of the earth or we degrade the fertility of the earth bit by bit until we have ruined it. Does it take a writer of fiction to bring you the cold comfort of pointing out that the problems are mutually exclusive? The one problem, the instant catastrophe, is not to be dealt with here. It would be irresponsible of me to turn this platform into a stage for acting out some antiatomic harangue and equally irresponsible at this juncture in history for me to ignore our perils. You know them as well as I do. As so often, when the unspeakable is to be spoken, the unthinkable thought, it is Shakespeare we must turn to; and I can only quote Hamlet with the skull:

> "Not one now, to mock your own grinning? Quite chop-fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that."

I am being rather unfair to the lady, perhaps, for there will be skulls of all shapes and sizes and sexes. I speak tangentially. No other quotation gives the dirt of it all, another kind of poetry of the fact. I must say something of this danger and I have said it for I could do no less. Now as far as this matter is concerned, I have done.

The other danger is more difficult to combat. To quote another laureate, our race may end not with a bang but a whimper. It must be nearer seventy years ago than sixty that I first discovered and engaged myself to a magic place. This was on the west coast of our country. It was on the seashore among rocks. I early became acquainted with the wonderful interplay of earth and moon and sun, enjoying them at the same time as I was assured that scientifically you could not have action influenced at a distance. There was a particular phase of the moon at which the tide sank more than usually far down and revealed to me a small recess which I remember as a cavern. There was plenty of life of one sort or another round all the rocks and in the pools among them. But this pool, farthest down and revealed, it seemed, by an influence from the sky only once or twice during the times when I had the holiday privilege of living near it – this last recess before the even more mysterious deep sea had strange inhabitants which I had found nowhere else. I can now remember and even feel but alas not describe the peculiar engagement, excitement and, no, not sympathy or empathy, but passionate recognition of a living thing in all its secrecy and strangeness. It was or rather they were real as I was. It was as if the centre of our universe was there for my eyes to reach at like hands, to seize on by sight. Only a hand's breadth away in the last few inches of still water they flowered, grey, green and purple, palpably alive, a discovery, a meeting, more than an interest or pleasure. They were life, we together were delight itself; until the first ripples of returning water blurred and hid them. When the summer holidays were over and I went back again about as far from the sea as you can get in

England I carried with me like a private treasure the memory of that cave – no, in some strange way I took the cave with me and its creatures that flowered so strangely. In nights of sleeplessness and fear of the supernatural I would work out the phase of the moon, returning in thought to the slither and clamber among the weeds of the rocks. There were times when, though I was far away, I found myself before the cavern watching the moon-dazzle as the water sank and was comforted somehow by the magical beauty of our common world.

I have been back, since. The recess – for now it seems no more than that – is still there, and at low water springs if you can bend down far enough you can still look inside. Nothing lives there any more. It is all very clean now, ironically so, clean sand, clean water, clean rock. Where the living creatures once clung they have worn two holes like the orbits of eyes, so that you might well sentimentalize yourself into the fancy that you are looking at a skull. No life.

Was it a natural process? Was it fuel oil? Was it sewage or chemicals more deadly that killed my childhood's bit of magic and mystery? I cannot tell and it does not matter. What matters is that this is only one tiny example among millions of how we are impoverishing the only planet we have to live on.

Well now, what has literature to say to that? We have computers and satellites, we have ingenuities of craft that can land a complex machine on a distant planet and get reports back. And so on. You know it all as well and better than I. Literature has words only, surely a tool as primitive as the flint axe or even the soft copper chisel with which man first carved his own likeness in stone. That tool makes a poor showing one would think among the products of the silicon chip. But remember Churchill. For despite the cynical critic, he got the Nobel Prize neither for poetry nor prose. He got it for about a single page of simple sentences which are neither poetry nor prose but for what, I repeat, has been called finely the poetry of the fact. He got it for those passionate utterances which were the very stuff of human courage and defiance. Those of us who lived through those times know that Churchill's poetry of the fact changed history.

Perhaps then the soft copper chisel is not so poor a tool after all. Words may, through the devotion, the skill, the passion, and the luck of writers prove to be the most powerful thing in the world. They may move men to speak to each other because some of those words somewhere express not just what the writer is thinking but what a huge segment of the world is thinking. They may allow man to speak to man, the man in the street to speak to his fellow until a ripple becomes a tide running through every nation – of commonsense, of simple healthy caution, a tide that rulers and negotiators cannot ignore so that nation does truly speak unto nation. Then there is hope that we may learn to be temperate, provident, taking no more from nature's treasury than is our due. It may be by books, stories, poetry, lectures we who have the ear of mankind can

move man a little nearer the perilous safety of a warless and provident world. It cannot be done by the mechanical constructs of overt propaganda. I cannot do it myself, cannot now create stories which would help to make man aware of what he is doing; but there are others who can, many others. There always have been. We need more humanity, more care, more love. There are those who expect a political system to produce that; and others who expect the love to produce the system. My own faith is that the truth of the future lies between the two and we shall behave humanly and a bit humanely, stumbling along, haphazardly generous and gallant, foolishly and meanly wise until the rape of our planet is seen to be the preposterous folly that it is.

For we are a marvel of creation. I think in particular of one of the most extraordinary women, dead now these five hundred years, Juliana of Norwich. She was caught up in the spirit and shown a thing that might lie in the palm of her hand and in the bigness of a nut. She was told it was the world. She was told of the strange and wonderful and awful things that would happen there. At the last, a voice told her that all things should be well and all manner of things should be well and all things should be very well.

Now we, if not in the spirit, have been caught up to see our earth, our mother, Gaia Mater, set like a jewel in space. We have no excuse now for supposing her riches inexhaustible nor the area we have to live on limitless because unbounded. We are the children of that great blue white jewel. Through our mother we are part of the solar system and part through that of the whole universe. In the blazing poetry of the fact we are children of the stars.

I had better come down, I think. Churchill, Juliana of Norwich, let alone Ben Jonson and Shakespeare – Lord, what company we keep! Reputations grow and dwindle and the brightest of laurels fade. That very practical man, Julius Caesar – whom I always think of for a reason you may guess at, as Field Marshal Lord Caesar – Julius Caesar is said to have worn a laurel wreath to conceal his baldness. While it may be proper to praise the idea of a laureate the man himself may very well remember what his laurels will hide and that not only baldness. In a sentence he must remember not to take himself with unbecoming seriousness. Fortunately some spirit or other – I do not presume to put a name to it – ensured that I should remember my smallness in the scheme of things. The very day after I learned that I was the laureate for literature for 1983 I drove into a country town and parked my car where I should not. I only left the car for a few minutes but when I came back there was a ticket taped to the window. A traffic warden, a lady of a minatory aspect, stood by the car. She pointed to a notice on the wall. “Can’t you read?” she said. Sheepishly I got into my car and drove very slowly round the corner. There on the pavement I saw two county policemen.

I stopped opposite them and took my parking ticket out of its plastic envelope. They crossed to me. I asked if, as I had pressing business, I

could go straight to the Town Hall and pay my fine on the spot. "No, sir," said the senior policeman, "I'm afraid you can't do that." He smiled the fond smile that such policemen reserve for those people who are clearly harmless if a bit silly. He indicated a rectangle on the ticket that had the words 'name and address of sender' printed above it. "You should write your name and address in that place," he said. "You make out a cheque for ten pounds, making it payable to the Clerk to the Justices at *this* address written here. Then you write the same address on the outside of the envelope, stick a sixteen-penny stamp in the top right hand corner of the envelope, then post it. And may we congratulate you on winning the Nobel Prize for Literature."

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Banquet Speech

William Golding's speech at the Nobel Banquet, December 10, 1983

Your Majesties, your Royal Highnesses, your Excellencies,

Fellow Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I came to Sweden characterized as a pessimist, though I am an optimist. Now something – perhaps the wonderful warmth of your hospitality – has changed me into a comic. That is a hard position to sustain. It reminds me of days long ago when as a poor teacher I would take turn about during the night with my wife, getting our infant daughter to sleep. I remember once, how at three o'clock in the morning when I began to creep away from the cradle with its sleeping child, she opened her eyes and remarked: "Daddy, say something funny".

However, the moment has come for me to put off the jester's cap and bells.

I do thank Sweden for its wonderfully warm hospitality and I do thank the Nobel Foundation and the Swedish Academy for the welcome and unexpected way in which they have, so to speak, struck me with lightning. I only wish all borders were as easy to cross and all international exchanges as friendly.

I have been in many countries and I have found there people examining their own love of life, sense of peril, their own common sense. The one thing they cannot understand is why that same love of life, sense of peril and above all common sense, is not invariably shared among their leaders and rulers.

Then let me use what I suppose is my last minute of worldwide attention to speak not as one of a nation but as one of mankind. I use it to reach all men and women of power. Go back. Step back now. Agreement between you does not need cleverness, elaboration, manoeuvres. It needs common sense, and above all, a daring generosity. Give, give, give!

It would succeed because it would meet with worldwide relief, acclaim and rejoicing: and unborn generations will bless your name.

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Press Release

Swedish Academy

The Permanent Secretary

Press release
October 1983

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1983

William Golding

William Golding's first novel, *Lord of the Flies*, 1954, rapidly became a world success and has so remained. It has reached

readers who can be numbered in tens of millions. In other words, the book was a bestseller, in a way that is usually granted only to adventure stories, light reading and children's books. The same goes for several of his later novel, including *Rites of Passage,* 1980.

The reason is simple. These books are very entertaining and exciting. They can be read with pleasure and profit without the need to make much effort with learning or acumen. But they have also aroused an unusually great interest in professional literary critics, scholars, writers and other interpreters who have sought and found deep strata of ambiguity and complication in Golding's work. In those who use the tools of narration and linguistic art, they have incited to thinking, discovery and creation of their own, in order to explore the world we live in and to settle down in it. In this respect, William Golding can perhaps be compared to another Englishman, Jonathan Swift, who has also become a writer for the learned and the unlearned, or, to the American, Herman Melville, whose works are full of equivocal profundity as well as fascinating adventure. In fact the resemblance extends farther than that. Golding has a very keen sight and sharp pen when it comes to the power of evil and baseness in human beings – just like Jonathan Swift. And like Herman Melville, he often chooses his themes and the framework for his stories from the world of the sea, or from other challenging situations in which odd people are tempted to reach beyond their limits, thereby being bared to the very marrow. His stories usually have a fairly schematic drama, almost an anecdote, as skeleton. He then covers this with a richly varied and spicy flesh of colourful characters and surprising events.

William Golding can be said to be a writer of myths. It is the pattern of myth that we find in his manner of writing.

A very few basic experiences and basic conflicts of a deeply general nature underlie all his work as motive power. In one of his essays he describes how, as a young man, he took an optimistic view of existence. He believed that man would be able to perfect himself by improving society and eventually doing away with all social evil. His optimism was akin to that of other utopians, for instance, H.G. Wells.

The second world war changed his outlook. He discovered what one human being is really able to do to another. And it was not

a question of head-hunters in New Guinea or primitive tribes in the Amazon region. They were atrocities committed with cold professional skill by well-educated and cultured people – doctors, lawyers, and those with a long tradition of high civilization behind them. They carried out their crimes against their own equals. He writes:

"I must say that anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as a bee produces honey, must have been blind or wrong in the head."

Golding inveighs against those who think that it is the political or other systems that create evil. Evil springs from the depths of man himself – it is the wickedness in human beings that creates the evil systems, or, that changes what, from the beginning, is, or could be, good into something iniquitous and destructive.

There is a mighty religious dimension in William Golding's conception of the world, though hardly Christian in the ordinary sense. He seems to believe in a kind of Fall. Perhaps, rather, one should say that he works with the myth of a Fall. In some of his stories, chiefly the novel, *The Inheritors*, 1955, we find a dream of an original state of innocence in the history of mankind – a prehistoric race or breed of animals, poor in words but rich in pictures and wordless communication, a peaceful existence with the women or female qualities in the lead. The Fall came with the motive power of a new species. The aggressive intelligence, the power-hungry self-assertion, and the overweening individualism are the source of evil and violence – individual, as well as social violence. But these qualities and incentives are also innate in man's nature, in man as a created being. They are, therefore, inseparably, a part of his character and make themselves felt when he gives full expression to himself and forms his societies and his private destiny.

We come across this tragic drama in many different ways in William Golding's novels. In *Lord of the Flies*, a group of young boys are isolated on a desert island. Soon a kind of primitive society takes shape and is split into warring factions, one marked by decency and willingness to cooperate, the other by worship of force, lust for power and violence. In *The Pyramid*, 1967, we find similar tensions in a more everyday setting – an English country town. The social class differences exercise an insidious, but equally ruthless, violence in an existence full of lovelessness

and prejudiced hypocrisy. The novel, *Pincher Martin*, 1956, depicts how the main character, the narrator, is drowning. Actually he is already dead or dying as he tells his story. In his passionate absorption in himself, he seems, for a time, to get the better of death. He does so by recounting his life to himself, a life full of ruthless egoism and cruelty to others, a miserable life, yet it was his, and on no account does he want to lose it. He, the dead man, tries to make the rock to which he is clinging into a picture of himself. It is a weird ghost story, a fable of a will to live without shame or moderation.

In the novel, *Rites of Passage*, 1980, the drama is enacted in the microcosm that the author arranges on a ship of the line at the beginning of the 19th century. The book gives a cruel and drastic description of social barriers and aggressions on this ship, with an underlying black comedy and a masterly command of the characters' various linguistic roles. The scapegoat – one of many in Golding's works – is a priest who, naively trusting in the authority of his office, tries to assert his own dignity. He is subjected to outrages, each worse than the last, himself taking part in them, and ends up in such a desperate situation that he dies of shame.

The title of the previous novel, *Darkness Visible*, 1979, alludes to Milton's depiction of hell. It is a complicated book which, in many ways, sums up the author's view of mankind and the world, such as one can fancy it to be in his work. The novel can be regarded as a description of hell, or of purgatory, here on earth. The advocates of evil appear with almost diabolical traits in the form of two beautiful young girls who are driven by a liking for evil for its own sake. Opposed to them is yet another of Golding's scapegoats – a young man born out of a blazing inferno in London during the Blitz, and on a pilgrimage in a world without mercy towards his own destruction, again through fire. He is both human being, pitiful and weak as such, and something more, in league with powers of another kind, whether they belong to a superhuman region or to an all too human world of fancies and illusions. *Darkness Visible* is a dualistic book – one is tempted to say, an illustration in myth form of a Manichean philosophy with good and evil as two independent forces in life.

All is not evil in the world of mankind, and all is not black in William Golding's imagined world. According to him, man has two characteristics – the ability to murder is one, belief in God the other. Innocence is not entirely lost. The new race, which

defeated its predecessors in *The Inheritors*, became mixed with features from the conquered. There is a striving away from evil. This striving often goes astray in self-assertion and illusionism, But it is there, nevertheless, and is allied with something that is not merely human. In the novel *The Spire*, 1964, this striving is embodied in a story about the building of a medieval cathedral. The builder is a priest who believes he has been ordered by God to build a spire that defies all reasonable calculations and measurements. His striving is both good and bad, containing the most complex reasons – humility and conviction, but also arrogance, wilfulness and furtive sexual motives. Despite its taut and composite form, the novel is one of Golding's most diversified and significant works.

William Golding's novels and stories are, however, not only sombre moralities and dark myths about evil and about treacherous, destructive forces. As already mentioned, they are also colourful tales of adventure which can be read as such, full of narrative joy, inventiveness and excitement. In addition, there are plentiful streaks of humour-biting irony, comedy and drastic jesting. There is a vitality which breaks through what is tragic and misanthropic, frightening in fact. A vitality, a vigour, which is infectious owing to its strength and intractability and to the paradoxical freedom it possesses as against what is related. In this, too, Golding reminds us of the predecessors mentioned at the beginning. His fabled world is tragic and pathetic, yet not overwhelming and depressing. There is a life which is mightier than life's conditions.

Bio-bibliographical Notes

Golding was born in Cornwall on 19 September 1911. His father, a well-known educationalist, moved with his family to Wiltshire, where he taught at Marlborough Grammar School. On completion of his studies at the same school in 1930, the son went up to Oxford, where first, at his father's request, he devoted himself to natural science. Soon he changed to English literature, with a special interest in the Anglo-Saxon period. After passing his exams in 1934 he worked in small theatrical companies as writer, actor and producer, but for a year or two before the war, and fifteen years or so thereafter, he was also teacher. During the second world war he served in the navy and took part – finally as lieutenant – in various naval actions such as the sinking of the battleship "Bismarck" and the landing in

Normandy, decisive experiences which can be traced here and there in his writings. The watches at sea gave him time for another main interest: the Greek language and literature. Having already decided at the age of seven to be a writer, he made his début as early as 1934 with a small collection of poems, which however he wishes to ignore. Golding does not look upon himself as a poet and his real début with the novel *Lord of the Flies,* with which he at once made his name, was not until 1954, when he was 43. Since then he has published seven novels, a collection of short stories, and several plays, essays and articles. His interests apart from writing – in which they are also reflected, are archaeology, Egyptology, classic Greek, music (he plays several instruments) and sailing. Since 1955 he has been a member of the Royal Society of Literature and has received a number of awards.

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Photo Gallery

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1983/golding/photo-gallery/

1 (of 1) William Golding delivering his banquet speech at the
Nobel Banquet in the Stockholm City Hall, Sweden, on 10 December 1983.
See all photos

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Videos

01] PP Presentation

https://silviamazzau.com/documents/monografie/william-golding-mono.pdf

02] William Golding: Lord of the Flies & Beyond
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=741DPvan9RE [1:16:41]

03] William Golding: Nobel Laureate in Literature 1983
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpWaYDc4vLQ [35:41]

04] The Work of William Golding with Tim Howles
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lyxyVIxvF4 [1:04:13]

Tim is Junior Research Fellow in Political Theology at Campion Hall, University of Oxford, and Researcher Director at the "Laudato Si'

Research Institute", a new institute conducting academic research in the field of ecology and social change. He is also an ordained Priest in the Church of England. In this episode we discuss the work of William Golding.

05]"Lord of the Flies" by William Golding | A Podcast Summary of Classic Novels

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dBKPTHBb4I [39:32]

In 1954, William Golding published his famous book, "Lord of the Flies", which focuses on a group of British boys stranded on an uninhabited island and their disastrous attempt to govern themselves. Listen as Frank Lavallo hosts readers, Patrick and Joan Andrews, for a summary and discussion of the novel “Lord of the Flies.” Then stay tuned for Endnotes with Ted Schwartz.

06] Ninety-Nine Novels: The Spire by William Golding

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYCxSCNBph4 [52:02]

In 1984, Anthony Burgess published Ninety-Nine Novels, a selection of his favourite novels in English since 1939. The list is typically idiosyncratic, and shows the breadth of Burgess's interest in fiction. This podcast, by the International Anthony Burgess Foundation, explores the novels on Burgess's list with the help of writers, critics and other special guests.

In this episode, the Burgess Foundation's Graham Foster is joined by writer and academic Tim Kendall to talk about The Spire by William Golding. Published in 1964, The Spire tells the story of Jocelin, the dean of a medieval cathedral. He believes he has been tasked by God to build the tallest spire in England, but its construction is plagued by problems, just as Jocelin is plagued by visions both heavenly and otherwise.

William Golding was born in Cornwall in 1911. After becoming a schoolteacher in Salisbury in the 1930s, he was drafted into the Royal Navy for his wartime service, during which he participated in the Normandy Landings on D-Day. He began writing in the 1950s, and published his first novel Lord of the Flies in 1954. He won the Booker Prize in 1980 for Rites of Passage, beating Anthony Burgess’s Earthly Powers. He died in 1993 aged 81.

Tim Kendall is Professor of English at the University of Exeter. He is currently preparing the correspondence between William Golding and his editor Charles Monteith for publication by Faber & Faber. His next book, co-authored with Fiona Mathews is Black Ops and Beaver-Bombing, an exploration of Britain’s wild mammals and is forthcoming from Oneworld in spring 2023.

07] Arena - The Dreams of William Golding

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paEMIX2u9sY [1:39:02]

08] Lord of the Flies- The full book in 1 hour!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WRnlQvCubk [00:58:58]

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https://william-golding.co.uk/

Visit to find:

01] About William Golding
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06] A link to the interview from BBC

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13 Jul 1934

Aged 91 years

Wole Soyinka

Nobel Prize in Literature 1986

Born: 13 July 1934, Abeokuta, Nigeria
Residence at the time of the award: Nigeria

Prize motivation:

"who in a wide cultural perspective
and with poetic overtones fashions
the drama of existence"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1986/soyinka/facts/}

Links to Other Sites

(01) On Wole Soyinka from Pegasos Author's Calendar
(02)'Writing, Theater Arts, and Political Activism' – Conversation with Wole Soyinka (video and text version) from Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley
(03)Wole Soyinka: The Climate of Fear – Reith Lecture 2004 from BBC Radio 4
(04)On Wole Soyinka from American Academy of Achievement

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Professor Lars Gyllensten, of the Swedish Academy

Translation from the Swedish text

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Wole Soyinka, born in Nigeria in 1934, writes in English and is chiefly recognized as a dramatist. His many-sided and vital literary works also include some important collections of poems and novels, an interesting autobiography and a large number of articles and essays. He has been, and is, very active as a man of the theatre and has staged his own plays in England and Nigeria. He has himself taken part as an actor and energetically joined in theatrical debates and theatre policies. During the civil war in Nigeria in the middle of the 1960s he was drawn into the struggle for liberty because of his opposition to violence and terror. He was imprisoned under brutal and illegal forms in 1967 and was released over two years later – an experience that drastically affected his outlook on life and literary work.

Soyinka has depicted his childhood in a little African village. His father was a teacher, his mother a social worker – both Christian. But in the preceding generation there were medicine men and others who believed firmly in spirits, magic, and rites of anything but a Christian kind. We encounter a world in which tree sprites, ghosts, sorcerer and primitive African traditions were living realities. We also come face to face with a more complicated world of myth, which has its roots far back in an African culture handed down by word of mouth. This account of childhood gives a background to Soyinka's literary works – a self-experienced, close connection with a rich and complex African heritage.

Soyinka made an early appearance as a dramatist. It was natural for him to seek this art form, which is closely linked with the African material and with African forms of linguistic and mime creation. His plays make frequent and skilful use of many elements belonging to stage art and which also have genuine roots in African culture-dance and rites, masques and pantomime, rhythm and music, declamation, theatre within the theatre etc. His first dramas are lighter and more playful than the later ones – pranks, ironical and satirical scenes, pictures of everyday life with telling and witty dialogue, often with a tragicomical or grotesque sense of life as keynote. Among these early plays can be mentioned *A Dance of the Forests* – a kind of African "Midsummer Night's Dream", with dryads, ghosts, spirits, and gods or demi-gods. It is about creativeness and sacrifice, with the god or hero Ogun as one

of the performers. This Ogun is a Prometheus – like figure – the demigod of iron and artistic skill but also of war and battle, a double figure combining both creation and destruction in his being. Soyinka has often reverted to him.

Soyinka's dramas are deeply rooted in an African world and culture. But he is also a widely read, not to say learned writer and dramatist. He is familiar with western literature, from the Greek tragedies to Beckett and Brecht. Also, outside the field of drama he is well versed in the great European literature. A writer like James Joyce, for instance, has left traces in his novels. Soyinka is an author who writes with great deliberation, and especially in his novels and poems he can be avant-gardistically sophisticated.

During the war years, his time in prison and afterwards, his writing takes on a more tragic character. The psychological, moral and social conflicts appear more and more complex and menacing. The book-keeping of good and evil, of destructive and constructive forces, becomes increasingly ambiguous. His dramas become equivocal – dramas which in the shape of allegory or satire take up moral, social, and political matters for mythical-dramatic creation. The dialogue is sharpened, the characters become more expressive, often exaggerated to the point of caricature, demanding denouement – the dramatic temperature is raised. The vitality is no less than in the first works – on the contrary: the satire, the humour, the elements of grotesquery and comedy, and the mythical fable-making come vividly to life. The way in which Soyinka makes use of the mythical material, the African, and the literary schooling, the European, is very independent. He says he uses the myths as "the aesthetic matrix" for his writing. It is thus not a question of a folkloristic reproduction, a kind of exoticism, but an independent and co-operative work. The myths, traditions, and rites are integrated as nourishment for his writing, not a masquerade costume. He has called his wide reading and literary awareness a "selective eclecticism" – i.e. purposeful and sovereign choice. Among the later dramas special mention can be made of *Death and the King's Horseman* – a genuinely, dramatically convincing work full of many ideas and meanings, of poetry, satire, surprise, cruelty, and lust. Superficially it is about a conflict between western morals and convention on the one hand, and African culture and tradition on the other. The theme moves around a ritual or cultic human sacrifice. The drama goes so deeply into human and superhuman conditions that it cannot be reduced to something that teaches us about breaches between different civilizations. Soyinka himself prefers to see it as a metaphysical and religious drama of fate. It is about the conditions of the human identity and realization, the mythical pact of life and death, and the possibilities of the unborn.

To Soyinka's non-dramatic works belong the autobiographically inspired accounts *The Man Died*, from his time in prison, and the novel *The Interpreters*, from intellectual circles in Nigeria. The novel *Season of Anomy* is an allegory with the Orpheus and Eurydice myth as framework, a somewhat complicated, symbolic-expressionistic story with a background in brutal social and political conditions of oppression and corruption. Outstanding among the poems are collections with motifs from his time in prison, some of them written during his imprisonment as a kind of mental exercise to help the author survive with dignity and fortitude. The imagery in these poems is compact and rather hard to penetrate, sometimes, however, with a laconic or ascetic concentration. It takes some time to get to know them intimately, but they can then yield a strange emanation that gives evidence of their background and role in a harsh, difficult period in the poet's life – moving testimony to courage and artistic strength.

As already mentioned, it is chiefly the dramas that stand out as Wole Soyinka's most significant achievement. They are of course made to be acted on the stage, with dance, music, masques, and mime as essential components. But his plays can also be read as important and fascinating literary works from a richly endowed writer's experience and imagination – and with roots in a composite culture with a wealth of living and artistically inspiring traditions.

Dear Mr. Soyinka,

In your versatile writings you have been able to synthesize a very rich heritage from your own country, ancient myths and old traditions, with literary legacies and traditions of European culture. There is a third component, a most important component in what you have thus achieved – your own genuine and impressive creativity as an artist, a master of language, and your commitment as a dramatist and writer of poetry and prose to problems of general and deep significance for man, modern or ancient. It is my privilege to convey to you the warm congratulations of the Swedish Academy and to ask you to receive this year's Nobel Prize for Literature from the hand of His Majesty the King.

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Nobel Prize Lecture

Nobel Lecture, December 8, 1986

This Past Must Address Its Present

A rather curious scene, unscripted, once took place in the wings of a London theatre at the same time as the scheduled performance was being presented on the actual stage, before an audience. What happened was this: an actor refused to come on stage for his allocated role. Action was suspended. A fellow actor tried to persuade him to emerge, but he stubbornly shook his head. Then a struggle ensued. The second actor had hoped that, by suddenly exposing the reluctant actor to the audience in full glare of the spotlight, he would have no choice but to rejoin the cast. And so he tried to take the delinquent actor by surprise, pulling him suddenly towards the stage. He did not fully succeed, so a brief but untidy struggle began. The unwilling actor was completely taken aback and deeply embarrassed – some of that tussle was quite visible to a part of the audience.

The performance itself, it should be explained, was an improvisation around an incident. This meant that the actors were free, within the convention of the performance – to stop, re-work any part they wished, invite members of the audience on stage, assign roles and change costumes in full view of the audience. They therefore could also dramatize their wish to have that uncooperative actor join them – which they did with gusto. That actor had indeed left the stage before the contentious scene began. He had served notice during rehearsals that he would not participate in it. In the end, he had his way, but the incident proved very troubling to him for weeks afterwards. He found himself compelled to puzzle out this clash in attitudes between himself and his fellow writers and performers. He ex perienced, on the one hand, an intense rage that he had been made to appear incapable of confronting a stark reality, made to appear to suffer from interpretative coyness, to seem inhibited by a cruel reality or perhaps to carry his emotional involvement with an event so far as to interfere with his professional will. Of course, he knew that it was none of these things. The truth was far simpler. Unlike his colleagues together with whom he shared, unquestionably, the same political attitude towards the event which was being represented, he found the mode of presentation at war with the ugliness it tried to convey, creating an intense disquiet about his very presence on that stage, in that place, before an audience whom he considered collectively responsible for that dehumanizing actuality.

And now let us remove some of the mystery and make that incident a little more concrete. The scene was the Royal Court Theatre, London, 1958. It was one of those Sunday nights which were given to experimentation, an innovation of that remarkable theatre manager-director, George Devine, whose creative nurturing radicalised British theatre of that period and produced later icons like John Osborne, N. F. Simpson, Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter, John Arden, etc., and even forced the then conservative British palate to sample stylistic and ideological

pariahs like Samuel Beckett and Bertold Brecht. On this particular occasion, the evening was devoted to a form of "living" theatre, and the main fare was titled ELEVEN MEN DEAD AT HOLA. The actors were not all professional actors; indeed, they were mostly writers who jointly created and performed these dramatic pieces. Those with a long political memory may recall what took place at Hola Camp, Kenya, during the Mau-Mau Liberation struggle. The British Colonial power believed that the Mau-Mau could be smashed by herding Kenyans into special camps, trying to separate the hard cases, the mere suspects and the potential recruits – oh, they had it all neatly worked out. One such camp was Hola Camp and the incident involved the death of eleven of the detainees who were simply beaten to death by camp officers and warders. The usual enquiry set up, and it was indeed the Report which provided the main text on which the performance was based.
We need now only to identify the reluctant actor, if you have not guessed that by now – it was none other than this speaker. I recall the occasion as vividly as actors are wont to recollect for ever and ever the frightening moment of a blackout, when the lines are not only forgotten but even the moment in the play. The role which I had been assigned was that of a camp guard, one of the killers. We were equipped with huge night-sticks and, while a narrator read the testimony of one of the guards, our task was to raise the cudgels slowly and, almost ritualistically, bring them down on the necks and shoulders of the prisoners, under orders of the white camp officers. A surreal scene. Even in rehearsals, it was clear that the end product would be a surrealist tableau. The Narrator at a lectern under a spot; a dispassionate reading, deliberately clinical, letting the stark facts reveal the states of mind of torturers and victims. A small ring of white officers, armed. One seizes a cudgel from one of the warders to demonstrate how to beat a human being without leaving visible marks. Then the innermost clump of detainees, their only weapon – non-violence. They had taken their decision to go on strike, refused to go to work unless they obtained better camp conditions. So they squatted on the ground and refused to move, locked their hands behind their knees in silent defiance. Orders were given. The inner ring of guards, the blacks, moved in, lifted the bodies by hooking their hands underneath the armpits of the detainees, carried them like toads in a state of petrification to one side, divided them in groups.

The faces of the victims are impassive; they are resolved to offer no resistance. The beatings begin: one to the left side, then the back, the arms – right, left, front, back. Rhythmically. The cudgels swing in unison. The faces of the white guards glow with professional satisfaction, their arms gesture languidly from time to time, suggesting it is time to shift to the next batch, or beat a little more severely on the neglected side. In terms of images, a fluid, near balletic scene.

Then the contrast, the earlier official version, enacting how the prisoners were supposed to have died. This claimed that the prisoners had collapsed, that they died after drinking from a poisoned water supply. So we staged that also. The prisoners filed to the water waggon, gasping with thirst. After the first two or three had drunk and commenced writhing with pain, these humane guards rushed to stop the others but no, they were already wild with thirst, fought their way past salvation and drank greedily the same source. The groans spread from one to the other, the writhing, the collapse – then agonized deaths. That was the version of the camp governors.

The motif was simple enough, the theatrical format a tried and tested one, faithful to a particular convention. What then was the problem? It was one, I believe, that

affects most writers. When is playacting rebuked by reality? When is fictionalizing presumptuous? What happens after playacting? One of the remarkable properties of the particular theatrical convention I have just described is that it gives off a strong odour of perenniality, that feeling of "I have been here before". "I have been a witness to this." "The past enacts its presence." In such an instance, that sense of perenniality can serve both as exorcism, a certificate of release or indeed – especially for the audience, a soporific. We must bear in mind that at the time of presentation, and to the major part of that audience, every death of a freedom fighter was a notch on a gun, the death of a fiend, an animal, a bestial mutant, not the martyrdom of a patriot.

We know also, however, that such efforts can provoke changes, that an actualization of the statistical, journalistic footnote can arouse revulsion in the complacent mind, leading to the beginning of a commitment to change, redress. And on this occasion, angry questions had been raised in the Houses of Parliament. Liberals, humanitarians and reformists had taken up the cause of justice for the victims. Some had even travelled to Kenya to obtain details which exposed the official lie. This profound unease, which paralysed my creative will, therefore reached beyond the audience and, finally, I traced its roots to my own feelings of assaulted humanity, and its clamour for a different form of response. It provoked a feeling of indecency about that presentation, rather like the deformed arm of a leper which is thrust at the healthy to provoke a charitable sentiment. This, I believe, was the cause of that intangible, but totally visceral rejection which thwarted the demands of my calling, rendered it inadequate and mocked the empathy of my colleagues. It was as if the inhuman totality, of which that scene was a mere fragment, was saying to us: Kindly keep your comfortable sentiment to yourselves.

Of course, I utilize that episode only as illustration of the far deeper internalised processes of the creative mind, a process that endangers the writer in two ways: he either freezes up completely, or he abandons the pen for far more direct means of contesting unacceptable reality. And again, Hola Camp provides a convenient means of approaching that aspect of my continent's reality which, for us whom it directly affronts, constitutes the greatest threat to global peace in our actual existence. For there is a gruesome appropriateness in the fact that an African, a black man should stand here today, in the same year that the progressive Prime Minister of this host country was murdered, in the same year as Samora Machel was brought down on the territory of the desperate last-ditch guardians of the theory of racial superiority which has brought so much misery to our common humanity. Whatever the facts are about Olof Palme's death, there can be no question about his life. To the racial oppression of a large sector of humanity, Olof Palme pronounced, and acted, a decisive No! Perhaps it was those who were outraged by this act of racial "treachery" who were myopic enough to imagine that the death of an individual would arrest the march of his convictions; perhaps it was simply yet another instance of the Terror Epidemic that feeds today on shock, not reason. It does not matter; an authentic conscience of the white tribe has been stilled, and the loss is both yours and mine. Samora Machel, the leader who once placed his country on a war footing against South Africa, went down in as yet mysterious circumstances. True, we are all still haunted by the Nkomati Accord which negated that earlier triumphant moment on the African collective will; nevertheless, his foes across the border have good reason to rejoice over his demise and, in that sense, his death is, ironically, a form of triumph for the black race.

Is that perhaps too stark a paradox? Then let me take you back to Hola Camp. It is cattle which are objects of the stick, or whip. So are horses, goats, donkeys etc. Their definition therefore involves being occasionally beaten to death. If, thirty years after Hola Camp, it is at all thinkable that it takes the ingenuity of the most sophisticated electronic interference to kill an African resistance fighter, the champions of racism are already admitting to themselves what they continue to deny to the world: that they, white supremacist breed, have indeed come a long way in their definition of their chosen enemy since Hola Camp. They have come an incredibly long way since Sharpeville when they shot unarmed, fleeing Africans in the back. They have come very far since 1930 when, at the first organized incident of the burning of passes, the South African blacks decided to turn Dingaan's Day, named for the defeat of the Zulu leader Dingaan, into a symbol of affirmative resistance by publicly destroying their obnoxious passes. In response to those thousands of passes burnt on Cartright Flats, the Durban police descended on the unarmed protesters killing some half dozen and wounding hundreds. They backed it up with scorched earth campaign which dispersed thousands of Africans from their normal environment, victims of imprisonment and deportation. And even that 1930 repression was a quantum leap from that earlier, spontaneous protest against the Native Pass law in 1919, when the police merely rode down the protesters on horseback, whipped and sjamboked them, chased and harried them, like stray goats and wayward cattle, from street corner to shanty lodge. Every act of racial terror, with its vastly increasing sophistication of style and escalation in human loss, is itself an acknowledgement of improved knowledge and respect for the potential of what is feared, an acknowledgement of the sharpening tempo of triumph by the victimized.

For there was this aspect which struck me most forcibly in that attempt to recreate the crime at Hola Camp: in the various testimonies of the white officers, it stuck out, whether overtly stated or simply through their efficient detachment from the ongoing massacre. It was this: at no time did these white overseers actually experience the human "otherness" of their victims. They clearly did not experience the reality of the victims as human beings. Animals perhaps, a noxious form of vegetable life maybe, but certainly not human. I do not speak here of their colonial overlords, the ones who formulated and sustained the policy of settler colonialism, the ones who dispatched the Maxim guns and tuned the imperial bugle. They knew very well that empires existed which had to be broken, that civilizations had endured for centuries which had to be destroyed. The "sub-human" denigration for which their "civilizing mission" became the altruistic remedy, was the mere rationalizing icing on the cake of imperial greed. But yes indeed, there were the agents, those who carried out orders (like Eichmann, to draw parallels from the white continent); they – whether as bureaucrats, technicians or camp governors had no conceptual space in their heads which could be filled – except very rarely and exceptionally – by "the black as also human". It would be correct to say that this has remained the pathology of the average South African white since the turn of the last century to this moment. Here, for example is one frank admission by an enlightened, even radical mind of that country:

"It was not until my last year in school that it had occurred to me that these black people, these voteless masses, were in any way concerned with the socialism which I professed or that they had any role to play in the great social revolution which in these days seemed to be imminent. The 'workers' who were destined to inherit the

new world were naturally the white carpenters and bricklayers, the tramworkers and miners who were organized in their trade unions and who voted for the Labour Party. I would no more have thought of discussing politics with a native youth than of inviting him home to play with me or to a meal or asking him to join the Carnarvon Football Club. The African was on a different plane, hardly human, part of the scene as were dogs and trees and, more remotely, cows. I had no special feelings about him, not interest nor hate nor love. He just did not come into my social picture. So completely had I accepted the traditional attitudes of the time."

Yes, I believe that this self-analysis by Eddie Roux, the Afrikaaner political rebel and scientist, remains today the flat, unvarnished truth for the majority of Afrikaaners. "No special feelings, not interest nor hate nor love", the result of a complete acceptance of "traditional attitudes". That passage captures a mind's racial tabula rasa, if you like – in the first decade of this century – about the time, in short, when the Nobel series of prizes was inaugurated. But a slate, no matter how clean, cannot avoid receiving impressions once it is exposed to air – fresh or polluted. And we are now in the year 1986, that is after an entire century of direct, intimate exposure, since that confrontation, that first rejection of the dehumanizing label implicit in the Native Pass Laws.

Eddie Roux, like hundreds, even thousands of his countrymen, soon made rapid strides. His race has produced its list of martyrs in the cause of nonracialism – one remembers, still with a tinge of pain, Ruth First, destroyed by a letter bomb delivered by the long arm of Apartheid. There are others – André Brink, Abram Fischer, Helen Suzman – Breyten Breytenbach, with the scars of martyrdom still seared into their souls. Intellectuals, writers, scientists, plain working men, politicians – they come to that point where a social reality can no longer be observed as a culture on a slide beneath the microscope, nor turned into aesthetic variations on pages, canvas or the stage. The blacks of course are locked into an unambiguous condition: on this occasion I do not need to address *us*. We know, and we embrace our mission. It is the *other* that this precedent seizes the opportunity to address, and not merely those who are trapped within the confines of that doomed camp, but those who live outside, on the fringes of conscience. Those specifically, who with shameless smugness invent arcane moral propositions that enable them to plead inaction in a language of unparalleled political flatulence: "Personally, I find sanctions morally repugnant". Or what shall we say of another leader for whom economic sanctions which work against an Eastern European country will not work in the Apartheid enclave of South Africa, that master of histrionics who takes to the world's airwaves to sing: "Let Poland be", but turns off his hearing aid when the world shouts: "Let Nicaragua be". But enough of these world leaders of double-talk and multiple moralities.

It is baffling to any mind that pretends to the slightest claim to rationality, it is truly and formidably baffling. Can the same terrain of phenomenal assimilation – that is, one which produced evidence of a capacity to translate empirical observations into implications of rational human conduct – can this same terrain which, over half a century ago, fifty entire years, two, three generations ago produced the Buntings, the Roux, the Douglas Woltons, Solly Sachs, the Gideon Bothas – can that same terrain, fifty, sixty, even seventy years later, be peopled by a species of humanity so ahistorical that the declaration, so clearly spelt out in 1919 at the burning of the passes, remains only a troublesome event of no enduring significance?

Some atavistic bug is at work here which defies all scientific explanation, an arrest in time within the evolutionary mandate of nature, which puts all human experience of learning to serious question! We have to ask ourselves then, what event can speak to such a breed of people? How do we reactivate that petrified cell which houses historic apprehension and development? Is it possible, perhaps, that events, gatherings such as this might help? Dare we skirt the edge of hubris and say to them: Take a good look. Provide your response. In your anxiety to prove that this moment is not possible, you had killed, maimed, silenced, tortured, exiled, debased and dehumanized hundreds of thousands encased in this very skin, crowned with such hair, proudly content with their very being? How many potential partners in the science of heart transplant have you wasted? How do we know how many black South African scientists and writers would have stood here, by now, if you had had the vision to educate the rest of the world in the value of a great multi-racial society.

Jack Cope surely sums it up in his Foreword to THE ADVERSARY WITHIN, a study of dissidence in Afrikaaner literature when he states:

"Looking back from the perspective of the present, I think it can justly be said that, at the core of the matter, the Afrikaaner leaders in 1924 took the wrong turning. Themselves the victims of imperialism in its most evil aspect, all their sufferings and enormous loss of life nevertheless failed to convey to them the obvious historical lesson. They became themselves the new imperialists. They took over from Britain the mantle of empire and colonialism. They could well have set their faces against annexation, aggression, colonial exploitation, and oppression, racial arrogance and barefaced hypocrisy, of which they had been themselves the victims. They could have opened the doors to humane ideas and civilizing processes and transformed the great territory with its incalculable resources into another New World.

Instead they deliberately set the clock back wherever they could. Taking over ten million indigenous subjects from British colonial rule, they stripped them of what limited rights they had gained over a century and tightened the screws on their subjection."

Well, perhaps the wars against Chaka and Dingaan and Diginswayo, even the Great Trek were then too fresh in your *laager memory*. But we are saying that over a century has passed since then, a century in which the world has leapt, in comparative tempo with the past, at least three centuries. And we have seen the potential of man and woman – of all races – contend with the most jealously guarded sovereignty of Nature and the Cosmos. In every field, both in the Humanities and Sciences, we have seen that human creativity has confronted and tempered the hostility of his environment, adapting, moderating, converting, harmonizing, and even subjugating. Triumphing over errors and resuming the surrendered fields, when man has had time to lick his wounds and listen again to the urgings of his spirit. History – distorted, opportunistic renderings of history have been cleansed and restored to truthful reality, because the traducers of the history of others have discovered that the further they advanced, the more their very progress was checked and vitiated by the lacunae they had purposefully inserted in the history of others. Self-interest dictated yet another round of revisionism – slight, niggardly concessions to begin with. But a breach had been made in the dam and an avalanche proved the logical progression. From the heart of jungles, even before the aid of high-precision cameras mounted on orbiting satellites, civilizations have

resurrected, documenting their own existence with unassailable iconography and art. More amazing still, the records of the ancient voyagers, the merchant adventurers of the age when Europe did not yet require to dominate territories in order to feed its industrial mills – those objective recitals of mariners and adventurers from antiquity confirmed what the archeological remains affirmed so loudly. They spoke of living communities which regulated their own lives, which had evolved a working relationship with Nature, which ministered to their own wants and secured their future with their own genius. These narratives, uncluttered by the impure motives which needed to mystify the plain self-serving rush to dismantle independent societies for easy plundering – pointed accusing fingers unerringly in the direction of European savants, philosophers, scientists, and theorists of human evolution. Gobineau is a notorious name, but how many students of European thought today, even among us Africans, recall that several of the most revered names in European philosophy – Hegel, Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Voltaire – an endless list – were unabashed theorists of racial superiority and denigrators of the African history and being. As for the more prominent names among the theorists of revolution and class struggle – we will draw the curtain of extenuation on their own intellectual aberration, forgiving them a little for their vision of an end to human exploitation.

In any case, the purpose is not really to indict the past, but to summon it to the attention of a suicidal, anachronistic present. To say to that mutant present: you are a child of those centuries of lies, distortion and opportunism in high places, even among the holy of holies of intellectual objectivity. But the world is growing up, while you wilfully remain a child, a stubborn, self-destructive child, with certain destructive powers, but a child nevertheless. And to say to the world, to call attention to its own historic passage of lies – as yet unabandoned by some – which sustains the evil precocity of this child. Wherein then lies the surprise that we, the victims of that intellectual dishonesty of others, demand from that world that is finally coming to itself, a measure of expiation? Demand that it rescues itself, by concrete acts, from the stigma of being the wilful parent of a monstrosity, especially as that monstrous child still draws material nourishment, breath, and human recognition from the strengths and devises of that world, with an umbilical cord which stretches across oceans, even across the cosmos via so-called programmes of technological co-operation. We are saying very simply but urgently: Sever that cord. By any name, be it Total Sanction, Boycott, Disinvestment, or whatever, sever this umbilical cord and leave this monster of a birth to atrophy and die or to rebuild itself on long-denied humane foundations. Let it collapse, shorn of its external sustenance, let it collapse of its own social disequilibrium, its economic lopsidedness, its war of attrition on its most productive labour. Let it wither like an aborted foetus of the human family if it persists in smothering the minds and sinews which constitute its authentic being.

This pariah society that is Apartheid South Africa plays many games on human intelligence. Listen to this for example. When the whole world escalated its appeal for the release of Nelson Mandela, the South African Government blandly declared that it continued to hold Nelson Mandela for the same reasons that the Allied powers continued to hold Rudolf Hess! Now a statement like that is an obvious appeal to the love of the ridiculous in everyone. Certainly it wrung a kind of satiric poem out of me – Rudolf Hess as Nelson Mandela in blackface! What else can a writer do to protect his humanity against such egregious assaults! But yet again to equate Nelson Mandela to the archcriminal Rudolf Hess is a macabre improvement on the

attitude of regarding him as sub-human. It belongs on that same scale of Apartheid's self-improvement as the ratio between Sharpeville and Von Brandis Square, that near-kind, near-considerate, almost benevolent dispersal of the first Native Press rebellion.

That world which is so conveniently traduced by Apartheid thought is of course that which I so wholeheartedly embrace – and this is my choice – among several options – of the significance of my presence here. It is a world that nourishes my being, one which is so self-sufficient, so replete in all aspects of its productivity, so confident in itself and in its destiny that it experiences no fear in reaching out to others and in responding to the reach of others. It is the heartstone of our creative existence. It constitutes the prism of our world perception and this means that our sight need not be and has never been permanently turned inwards. If it were, we could not so easily understand the enemy on our doorstep, nor understand how to obtain the means to disarm it. When this society which is Apartheid South Africa indulges from time to time in appeals to the outside world that it represents the last bastion of civilization against the hordes of barbarism from its North, we can even afford an indulgent smile. It is sufficient, imagines this state, to raise the spectre of a few renegade African leaders, psychopaths and robber barons who we ourselves are victims of – whom we denounce before the world and overthrow when we are able – this Apartheid society insists to the world that its picture of the future is the reality which only its policies can erase. This is a continent which only destroys, it proclaims, it is peopled by a race which has never contributed anything positive to the world's pool of knowledge. A vacuum, that will suck into its insatiable maw the entire fruits of centuries of European civilization, then spew out the resulting mush with contempt. How strange that a society which claims to represent this endangered face of progress should itself be locked in centuries-old fantasies, blithely unaware of, or indifferent to the fact that it is the last, institutionally functioning product of archaic articles of faith in Euro-Judaic thought.

Take God and Law for example, especially the former. The black race has more than sufficient historic justification to be a little paranoid about the intrusion of alien deities into its destiny. For even today, Apartheid's mentality of the pre-ordained rests – according to its own unabashed claims, on what I can only describe as incidents in a testamentary Godism – I dare not call it Christianity. The sons of Ham on the one hand; the descendants of Shem on the other. The once pronounced, utterly immutable curse. As for Law, these supremacists base their refusal to concede the right of equal political participation to blacks on a claim that Africans have neither respect for, nor the slightest proclivity for Law – that is, for any arbitrating concept between the individual and the collective.

Even the mildest, liberal, somewhat regretful but contented apologists for Apartheid, for at least some form of Apartheid which is not Apartheid but ensures the *status quo* – even this ambivalent breed bases its case on this lack of the idea of Law in the black mind. I need only refer to a recent contribution to this literature in the form of an autobiography by a famous heart transplant surgeon, one who in his own scientific right has probably been a candidate for a Nobel Prize in the Sciences. Despite constant intellectual encounters on diverse levels, the sad phenomenon persists of Afrikaaner minds which, in the words of Eddie Roux, is a product of that complete acceptance of the "traditional attitudes of the time".

They have, as already acknowledged, quite "respectable" intellectual ancestors. Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, to cite just my favourite example, found it convenient to pretend that the African had not yet developed to the level where he "attained that realization of any substantial objective existence – as for example, God, or Law – in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being".

He continues:

"This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence, has not yet attained: so that the knowledge of absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting".

Futile to waste a moment refuting the banal untruthfulness of this claim, I content myself with extracting from it only a lesson which escapes, even today, those who insist that the pinnacle of man's intellectual thirst is the capacity to project this universality in the direction of a Super-Other. There is, I believe, a very healthy school of thought which not only opposes this materially, but has produced effectively structured societies which operate independently of this seductive, even productively, inspiring but extravagant fable.

Once we thus overcome the temptation to contest the denial of this feat of imaginative projection to the African, we find ourselves left only with the dispassionate exercise of examining in what areas we encounter differences between the histories of societies which, according to Hegel and company, never conceived of this Omnipotent Extrusion into Infinite Space, and those who did – be these differences in the areas of economic or artistic life, social relations or scientific attainment – in short, in all those activities which are empirically verifiable, quite different from the racial consequences of imprecations arising from that post Adam-and-Eve nudist escapade in the Old Testament.

When we do this, we come upon a curious fact. The pre-colonial history of African societies – and I refer to both Euro-Christian and Arab-Islamic colonization – indicates very clearly that African societies never at any time of their existence went to war with another over the issue of *their* religion. That is, at no time did the black race attempt to subjugate or forcibly convert others with any holier-than-thou evangelizing zeal. Economic and political motives, yes. But not religion. Perhaps this unnatural fact was responsible for the conclusions of Hegel – we do not know. Certainly, the bloody histories of the world's major religions, localized skirmishes of which extend even to the present, lead to a sneaking suspicion that religion, as defined by these eminent philosophers, comes to self-knowledge only through the activity of war.

When, therefore, towards the close of the Twentieth Century, that is, centuries after the Crusades and Jihads that laid waste other and one another's civilizations, fragmented ancient cohesive social relations and trampled upon the spirituality of entire peoples, smashing their cultures in obedience to the strictures of unseen gods, when today, we encounter nations whose social reasoning is guided by canonical, theological claims, we believe, on our part, that the era of darkness has

never truly left the world. A state whose justification for the continuing suppression of its indigenes, indigenes who constitute the majority on that land, rests on claims to divine selection is a menace to secure global relationship in a world that thrives on nationalism as common denominator. Such a society does not, in other words, belong in this modern world. We also have our myths, but we have never employed them as a base for the subjugation of others. We also inhabit a realistic world, however, and, for the recovery of the fullness of that world, the black race has no choice but to prepare itself and volunteer the supreme sacrifice.

In speaking of that world – both myth and reality – it is our duty, perhaps our very last peaceful duty to a doomed enemy – to remind it, and its supporters outside its boundaries, that the phenomenon of ambivalence induced by the African world has a very long history, but that most proponents of the slanderous aspects have long ago learnt to abandon the untenable. Indeed, it is probably even more pertinent to remind this racist society that our African world, its cultural hoards and philosophical thought, have had concrete impacts on the racists' own forebears, have proved seminal to a number of movements and even created tributaries, both pure and polluted, among the white indigenes in their own homelands.

Such a variety of encounters and responses have been due, naturally, to profound searches for new directions in their cultural adventures, seeking solaces to counter the remorseless mechanization of their existence, indeed seeking new meanings for the mystery of life and attempting to overcome the social malaise created by the very triumphs of their own civilization. It has led to a profound respect for the African contribution to world knowledge, which did not, however, end the habitual denigration of the African world. It has created in places a near-deification of the African person – that phase in which every African had to be a prince – which yet again, was coupled with a primitive fear and loathing for the person of the African. To these paradoxical responses, the essentiality of our black being remains untouched. For the black race knows, and is content simply to know, itself. It is the European world that has sought, with the utmost zeal, to re-define itself through these encounters, even when it does appear that he is endeavouring to grant meaning to an experience of the African world.

We can make use of the example of that period of European Expressionism, a movement which saw African art, music, and dramatic rituals share the same sphere of influence as the most disparate, astonishingly incompatible collection of ideas, ideologies, and social tendencies – Freud, Karl Marx, Bakunin, Nietzsche, cocaine, and free love. What wonder then, that the spiritual and plastic presence of the Bakota, Nimba, the Yoruba, Dogon, Dan etc., *should find themselves at once the inspiration* and the anathematized of a delirium that was most peculiarly European, mostly Teutonic and Gallic, spanning at least four decades across the last and the present centuries. Yet the vibrant goal remained the complete liberation of man, that freeing of his yet untapped potential that would carve marble blocks for the construction of a new world, debourgeoisify existing constrictions of European thought and light the flame to forge a new fraternity throughout this brave new world. Yes, within this single movement that covered the vast spectrum of outright fascism, anarchism, and revolutionary communism, the reality that was Africa was, as always, sniffed at, delicately tested, swallowed entire, regurgitated, appropriated, extoiled, and damned in the revelatory frenzy of a continent's recreative energies.

Oscar Kokoschka for instance: for this dramatist and painter African ritualism led mainly in the direction of sadism, sexual perversion, general self-gratification. It flowed naturally into a Nietzschean apocalyptic summons, full of self-induced, ecstatic rage against society, indeed, against the world. Vassily Kadinsky on his part, responded to the principles of African art by foreseeing:

"a science of art erected on a broad foundation which must be international in character".

insisting that

"it is interesting, but certainly not sufficient, to create an exclusively European art theory".

The science of art would then lead, according to him, to

"a comprehensive synthesis which will extend far beyond the confines of art into the realm of the oneness of the human and the 'divine'".

This same movement, whose centenary will be due for celebrations in European artistic capitals in the next decade or two – among several paradoxes the phenomenon of European artists of later acknowledged giant stature – Modigliani, Matisse, Gauguin, Picasso, Brancusi etc. worshipping with varying degrees of fervour, at the shrine of African and Polynesian artistic revelations, even as Johannes Becher, in his Expressionist delirium, swore to build a new world on the eradication of all plagues, including –

"Negro tribes, fever, tuberculosis, venereal epidemics, intellectual psychic defects – I'll fight them, vanquish them."

And was it by coincidence that contemporaneously with this stirring manifesto, yet another German enthusiast, Leo Frobenius – with no claims whatever to being part of, or indeed having the least interest in the Expressionist movement, was able to visit Ile-Ife, the heartland and cradle of the Yoruba race and be profoundly stirred by an object of beauty, the product of the Yoruba mind and hand, a classic expression of that serene portion of the world resolution of that race, in his own words:

"Before us stood a head of marvellous beauty, wonderfully cast in antique bronze, true to the life, incrusted with a patina of glorious dark green. This was, in very deed, the Olokun, Atlantic Africa's Poseidon."

Yet listen to what he had to write about the very people whose handiwork had lifted him into these realms of universal sublimity:

"Profoundly stirred, I stood for many minutes before the remnant of the erstwhile Lord and Ruler of the Empire of Atlantis. My companions were no less astounded. As though we have agreed to do so, we held our peace. Then I looked around and saw – the blacks – the circle of the sons of the 'venerable priest', his Holiness the Oni's friends, and his intelligent officials. I was moved to silent melancholy at the

thought that this assembly of degenerate and feeble-minded posterity should be the legitimate guardians of so much loveliness."

A direct invitation to a free-for-all race for dispossession, justified on the grounds of the keeper's unworthiness, it recalls other schizophrenic conditions which are mother to, for instance, the far more lethal, dark mythopoeia of Van Lvyck Louw. For though this erstwhile Nazi sympathizer would later rain maledictions on the heads of the more extreme racists of his countrymen:

"Lord, teach us to think what 'own' is, Lord let us think! and then: over hate against blacks, browns, whites: over this and its cause, I dare to call down judgement."

Van Lvyck's powerful epic RAKA was guaranteed to churn up the white cesspools of these primordial fears. A work of searing, visceral impact operating on racial memory, it would feed the Afrikaaner Credo on the looming spectre of a universal barbaric recession, bearing southwards on the cloven hooves of the Fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse, the black.

There is a deep lesson for the world in the black races' capacity to forgive, one which, I often think, has much to do with ethical precepts which spring from their world view and authentic religions, none of which is ever totally eradicated by the accretions of foreign faiths and their implicit ethnocentricism. For, not content with being a racial slanderer, one who did not hesitate to denigrate, in such uncompromisingly nihilistic terms, the ancestral fount of the black races – a belief which this ethnologist himself observed – Frobenius was also a notorious plunderer, one of a long line of European archeological raiders. The museums of Europe testify to this insatiable lust of Europe; the frustrations of the Ministries of Culture of the Third World and, of organizations like UNESCO are a continuing testimony to the tenacity, even recidivist nature of your routine receiver of stolen goods. Yet, is it not amazing that Frobenius is today still honoured by black institutions, black leaders, and scholars? That his anniversaries provide ready excuse for intellectual gatherings and symposia on the black continent, *that his racist condescensions*, assaults have not been permitted to obscure his contribution to their knowledge of Africa, or the role which he has played in the understanding of the phenomenon of human culture and society, even in spite of the frequent patchiness of his scholarship?

It is the same largeness of spirit which has informed the relationship today of erstwhile colonial nations, some of whom have undergone the most cruel forms of settler or plantation colonialism, where the human degradation that goes with greed and exploitation attained such levels of perversion that human ears, hands, and noses served to atone for failures in production quota. Nations which underwent the agony of wars of liberation, whose earth freshly teems with the bodies of innocent victims and unsung martyrs, live side by side today with their recent enslavers, even sharing the control of their destiny with those who, barely four or five years ago, compelled them to witness the massacre of their kith and kin. Over and above Christian charity, they are content to rebuild, and share. This spirit of collaboration is easy to dismiss as the treacherous ploy of that special breed of leaders who settle for early compromises in order to safeguard, for their own use, the polished shoes of the departing oppressors. In many cases, the truth of this must be conceded. But we also have examples of regimes, allied to the aspirations of their masses on the black continent, which have adopted this same political

philosophy. And, in any case, the final arbiters are the people themselves, from whose relationships any observations such as this obtain any validity. Let us simply content ourselves with remarking that it is a phenomenon worthy of note. There are, after all, European nations today whose memory of domination by other races remains so vivid more than two centuries after liberation, that a terrible vengeance culturally, socially, and politically is still exacted, even at this very moment, from the descendants of those erstwhile conquerors. I have visited such nations whose cruel histories under foreign domination are enshrined as icons to daily consciousness in monuments, parks, in museums and churches, in documentation, woodcuts, and photo gravures displayed under bullet-proof glass-cases but, most telling of all, in the reduction of the remnants of the conquering hordes to the degraded status of aliens on sufferance, with reduced civic rights, privileges, and social status, a barely tolerate marginality that expresses itself in the pathos of downcast faces, dropped shoulders, and apologetic encounters in those rare times when intercourse with the latterly assertive race is unavoidable. Yes, all this I have seen, and much of it has been written about and debated in international gatherings. And even while acknowledging the poetic justice of it in the abstract, one cannot help but wonder if a physical pound of flesh, excised at birth, is not a kinder act than a lifelong visitation of the sins of the father on the sons even to the tenth and twelfth generations.

Confronted with such traditions of attenuating the racial and cultural pride of these marginalized or minority peoples, the mind travels back to our own societies where such causative histories are far fresher in the memory, where the ruins of formerly thriving communities still speak eloquent accusations and the fumes still rise from the scorched earth strategies of colonial and racist myopia. Yet the streets bear the names of former oppressors, their statues and other symbols of subjugation are left to decorate their squares, the consciousness of a fully confident people having relegated them to mere decorations and roosting-places for bats and pigeons. And the libraries remain unpurged, so that new generations freely browse through the works of Frobenius, of Hume, Hegel, or Montesquieu and others without first encountering, freshly stamped on the fly-leaf: WARNING! THIS WORK IS DANGEROUS FOR YOUR RACIAL SELF-ESTEEM.

Yet these proofs of accommodation, on the grand or minuscule scale, collective, institutional, or individual, must not be taken as proof of an infinite, uncritical capacity of black patience. They constitute in their own nature, a body of tests, an accumulation of debt, an implicit offer that must be matched by concrete returns. They are the blocks in a suspended bridge begun from one end of a chasm which, whether the builders will it or not, must obey the law of matter and crash down beyond a certain point, settling definitively into the widening chasm of suspicion, frustration, and redoubled hate. On that testing ground which, for us, is Southern Africa, that medieval camp of biblical terrors, primitive suspicions, a choice must be made by all lovers of peace: either to bring it into the modern world, into a rational state of being within that spirit of human partnership, a capacity for which has been so amply demonstrated by every liberated black nation on our continent, or – to bring it abjectly to its knees by ejecting it, in every aspect, from humane recognition, so that it caves in internally, through the strategies of its embattled majority. Whatever the choice, this inhuman affront cannot be allowed to pursue our Twentieth Century conscience into the Twenty-first, that symbolic coming-of-age which peoples of all cultures appear to celebrate with rites of passage. That

calendar, we know, is not universal, but time is, and so are the imperatives of time. And of those imperatives that challenge our being, our presence, and humane definition at this time, none can be considered more pervasive than the end of racism, the eradication of human inequality, and the dismantling of all their structures. The Prize is the consequent enthronement of its complement: universal suffrage, and peace.

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Banquet Speech

Wole Soyinka's speech at the Nobel Banquet, December 10, 1986

Your Majesties, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was inevitable that the Nordic world and the African, especially that part of it which constitutes the Yoruba world – should meet at the crossroads of Sweden. That I am the agent of such a symbolic encounter is due very simply to that my creative Muse is Ogun, the god of creativity and destruction, of the lyric and metallurgy. This deity anticipated your scientist Alfred Nobel at the very beginning of time by clearing a path through primordial chaos, dynamiting his way through the core of earth to open a route for his fellow deities who sought to be reunited with us, mortals. I covered that event for my publishers – well, taking a few poetic licences, naturally – under the title IDANRE. You may have run into that reportage which has been translated into Swedish under the title, OGUN SKUGGA. If you have not, I recommend that you proceed to the nearest bookseller for this piece of pre-history which makes Ogun, very definitively, the progenitor of your great inventor, Alfred Nobel.

I urge this especially because, if you happened to take a casual walk through the streets, or peer into the hotel lobbies of Stockholm, you might get the impression that my nation, Nigeria, has tried to solve some of its many problems by shifting half its population surreptitiously to Sweden. I assure you, however, that they have merely come to satisfy a natural curiosity about the true nationality of this inventor. For they cannot understand why their Ogun should have transferred such a potent secret to a Swede rather than to his Yoruba descendants. The mountains of Sweden are a tempting habitat for this deity, we know, but the Swedish winter and long midnights are hardly congenial to his

temperament. And while the local acqua-vitae might help to infuse some warmth into his tropical joints, we do know that he tends to stick to his favourite palm wine.

Some day, I suppose, we will unravel this mystery. In the meantime, however, we will content ourselves with saluting the vision which made our presence here today a positive event, since it was Alfred Nobel's hope that the humanistic conversion, even of the most terrible knowledge, can improve the quality of life for mankind. That also is the lesson of Ogun, that essence of the warring duality of human nature. And we join in the endeavour that the lyric face of that demiurge will triumph in our time, snaring for all time that elusive bird – peace – on our planet earth.

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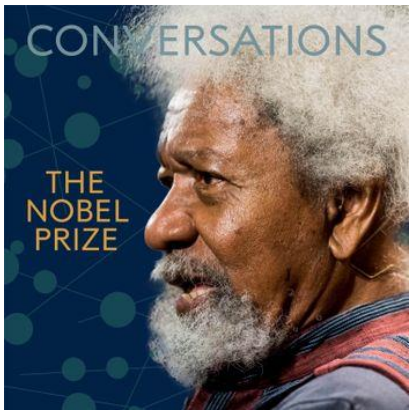
Nobel Prize Conversations



{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1986/soyinka/podcast/}

"In a number of my works, I am just narrating a tale for whoever is interested"

{32 Minutes}

In this podcast episode with literature laureate Wole Soyinka, conducted in November 2021, he talks about his photographic memory, his creative process and the question of who he writes literature for. His home of Nigeria figures prominently in his writing, and he looks ahead to the future of his country. Wole Soyinka also tells us about his passion for space and space travel, or as he puts it, "I am a space nut!"

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Interview

Interview, April 2005

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Interview with the 1986 Nobel Laureate in Literature, Wole Soyinka, 28 April 2005 by freelance journalist Simon Stanford.

Soyinka talks about his childhood in Aké; his experiences of the decolonization progress (6:11); how the political activities have influenced his writing (11:27); his being a "lazy writer" (15:37); theatre's advantage of reaching the audience (19:03); the Nobel Prize and how it has affected his life (28:27); and the threat of intolerance (36:42).

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Professor Wole Soyinka, Nobel Literature Laureate 1986, welcome to our interview.
Wole Soyinka: Thank you.

Let's start right at the very beginning. What were the circumstances of your birth, your early upbringing?
Wole Soyinka: I was born into a Christian household, in a parsonage in fact, so I grew up in sort of a missionary atmosphere but it was an environment which involved both the traditional religions as well as the Muslim religion, so we were exposed to all the various facets of faith, micro cultures which existed within those beliefs, and even though I've lost whatever Christian faith was drummed into me as a child, I still maintain very good relationship with all the various religions.

And you were born in a Nigerian town called, how do you pronounce it, Ake?
Wole Soyinka: Ake, Ake Abeokuta, I was born in the Ake sector of Abeokuta. Abeokuta is a nation city, it means literally "under the rocks" and it's a very rocky kind of environment and very lush, lots of greenery, of course, because it's a very tropical belt. It is a small town with the monarch, the Alake of Abeokuta, a mixture of traditional and western kind of cultures. My father was a schoolteacher and so I had the advantage of both western educational instruction in the school, as well as what you might call the process of imbibing the traditional processes of education instruction around me.

And this was colonial Nigeria. What were the forces that shaped the society?

Wole Soyinka: First of all it was a society which was very deeply steeped in its own cultures. Those cultures were never eradicated by contact with the missionary society. It was also a birth place of a lot of political agitation. While there was a pretty reasonable harmonious co-habitation with the European, the British specifically, British colonial forces, there was also a very keen sense of nationalism. In fact, the Egba kingdom, which Abeokuta is more or less the capital city, the Egba kingdom was one of the very last to be ceded to the British protectorate. It remained almost an independent entity within what is now known as Nigeria, simply because of its own traditional structure of governance.

You talk about political agitation … You talk in some of your writings and in your Nobel Lecture about the very, very young experience of your mother participating in a tax agitation against what was perceived as a very unfair tax. Did this political agitation, this very overtly political life, influence you from a very early age?

I grew up with a very strong sense of what is just and what is not …

Wole Soyinka: There's no question at all, I grew up with a very strong sense of what is just and what is not or, to put it this way, I grew up with a keen sense of a division, the reality of a division of perception in people's lives between those who govern and those who govern. The Alake of Abeokuta, for instance, was a revered individual, traditionally, was a powerful monarch and the institution of Obaship. Many people don't understand this outside, but actually the Yoruba system of Obaship, that's kingship, is really a pretty democratic one. There are severe limitations to what a king can do and not do. There is a council of chiefs who wield a lot of power, they're like a cabinet and if the king misbehaves or uses excessive power, this Ogboni council can actually meet, the enclave can meet and dethrone him. So the kind of autocratic notion which people have about Obaship, your system of kingship or that applies in other parts of Africa, of course, but this Yoruba is the example we're dealing with, it's not quite as rigid as they imagine.

When the Oba became somewhat high handed, autocratic, imposed what the women considered an unfair taxation on them, they rebelled and their protest was organised principally by my aunt, Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, and one of her lieutenants was my mother and I was fascinated by the conflict. I was interested in the causes, and I found myself on the side of the women, maybe I got moved into it because my mother was involved, but I think I understood sufficient about what was happening and I became the courier between various groups, demonstrating groups, and I got really caught up, physically and mentally, in the entire conflict and I've no doubt at all that early lesson left its mark on my political awareness.

Your life has been defined, punctuated by political incidents, some more benign and some very cruel and threatening, even to you personally. Can you describe some of that process?
Wole Soyinka: The process of decolonisation was a very untidy one. The British, when they were leaving finally and knew exactly who they wanted to take over, they wanted pliant government, figures, structures, they wanted to continue indirectly in effect their control over much of their colonial possessions and this was one of the very early causes of conflict. The British inclined more towards the feudal mentality, the feudal structures rather than the more radical progressive elements who would re-shape society and institute pretty egalitarian systems of governance with opportunity for even disadvantaged people and so I found that decolonisation was not just the end of political struggle.

There always are internal divisions which impose choice on citizens and those who were politically aware and so I found myself thrown into that division within bound society in the west of Nigeria especially and I wrote, used street theatre, we call it guerrilla theatre, wrote political sketches, performed them in open spaces and halls in which corrupt authority was attacked and this led eventually to even more activist action.

There was the incident where a radio station which was the result of my intervention in the attempt of the government to rig the elections and pronounce, you know, broadcast totally false results after inflicting violence on the voters, after intimidation failed completely and so I intervened in that. This ended me my first spell, you know, of conflict with the law because I was tried for allegedly holding up a radio station and substituting the Premier's state with mine, which more or less invited the Premier to get out of town sort of thing, but I was acquitted and then later things got even more serious. We had our first experience of a military coup which was very bloody. There were reprisals, there was a counter coup and all this led to a civil war.

I consider the civil war very unjust because the breakaway state of Biafra, I mean the conflict led to Biafrans, the Igbo people breaking away from Nigeria and while I thought that this was politically unwise, I found that it was not morally wrong because they had been decimated. There's no other word for it. It was an act of genocide which was perpetrated against the Igbo people. The causes, of course, are more complex than straightforward right and wrong but you could not escape the fact that there was an act of genocide and so I took position against the war, I allied with others who were like minded and we tried to intervene.

This led to my imprisonment for two years and four months, nearly two years of which was in solitary confinement, so that was like an escalation of risks, escalation of intensities of the cause of conflict. Then, after that, when I thought it was more or less all over, everything was stabilised, we were moving up to serious military dictatorships which were not acceptable but with which you had to live and even trying to obtain, keep something useful for the nation, for the people, with the more amenable of these, the

less obnoxious of some of them. Then the move towards democracy began all over again and suddenly it was aborted and aborted by a very singularly repellent kind of military individual and so I had to take action against him also which led eventually to my exile, my being placed on trial for treason, a price being placed on my head and so on and so forth. Part of occupational risk of one's endeavours.

Has this process been part of your perceived duty as a writer or as a citizen?

Wole Soyinka: The problem with literature, with writing, is that it works sometimes in terms of correction of social ills. Other times, it just does not suffice. The proof of that is the ability of a dictator to snuff out the life of a writer as happened to my colleague, Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Ogoni environmental activist who was hanged after a kangaroo trial by this brutal dictator, Sani Abacha, he and eight of his companions. When an event like that happens, and even lesser events of lesser gravity, the citizen comes to the fore, the citizen overtakes the writer because literature has proved or is proving inadequate and then forms of citizen action, whether it's demonstrations or sometimes, in the case of Christopher Okebo, another colleague of mine who lost his life, that's, you know, he went to war, he went on the Biafran side because he found that his poetry could not answer his sense of intense wrong and he perished on the front.

So writers throughout the ages have one weapon, which is literature, but they also have their responsibilities …

So writers throughout the ages have one weapon, which is literature, but they also have their responsibilities …

So writers throughout the ages have one weapon, which is literature, but they also have their responsibilities as a citizen when literature does not seem to suffice. I mean, they are not mutually exclusive. One continues to write anyway but if you are called out to demonstrate, if people are being killed in the streets, it's hardly the moment to go for your pen and paper, you know, help in one way or the other.

It's a very intense fire in which your craft, your art has been forged. Has it had a very powerful affect on your writing? Has it made your writing more intense?

Wole Soyinka: Could be. One thing I am certain of is that it has made me create and recreate different tempo or different tempi of writing. I've had to adjust to … I mean, ideally, for instance, I think most writers would like a quiet space, complete isolation, in which they control their own time. Spaces of creativity in which there's very little interruption. I think that's the idea and this perhaps is how I began as a writer, finding that space, that intense period in which I'm completely alone, completely alone.

But as you get drawn more and more into other activities, like political activities, very demanding, you have to find different rhythms of writing; I think that's the word I'm looking for, rhythms of creativity which then, of course, become very intense. I think your writing then tends to be very intensified simply because there are other demands which seem equally

important. You know, if they were just trivial demands and so on then it wouldn't matter at all, you can hive off a certain section of the mind and deal with that, but if it's something which consumes you, then there's a competition which concentrates your writing.

Did you find it easy to start writing or was it a struggle? Are you a natural writer?

Wole Soyinka: That's a very good question. I think I'm a very lazy writer and by that I mean that I do not battle, I don't struggle too hard against it. If I have difficulties in the writing, I just go and do other things. I don't feel a compulsion to write. Of course, when I start writing then it becomes a compulsive activity, because I've begun something and I want to continue, want to finish it. The characters in my play are crowding my head, demanding to be let out or demanding to be allowed to complete what they've set out to do, so there is compulsion there and of course I can carry an idea with me in my head, it just is there for months, years.

I remember doing 'The King's Horseman', when I first heard of that story, I wanted, I was so fascinated by it, I wanted to write it immediately but I didn't have time for it and other things came in between. Then one day I was teaching in Cambridge, and this is a play which is set in a colonial period, and my college was Churchill College and I used to come down the stairs, you know, towards the dining hall or going outside and there was this bust of this great genius of a colonialist and all the more hated for being such a genius at his work, at that kind of work, Winston Churchill.

I used to look at him and I felt each time like pushing the bust over the edge of the stairs and it was during that period that one day I recalled this story which had been in my head for – how many years? Maybe five, ten years, yes, about ten years and I sat and after that I just couldn't rest until I could sit at my typewriter then and start work on it and that's where I wrote it and wrote it, for a play of that complexity, virtually record time. Within the week I'd completed it and I brought people in to read it, so writing comes like in … it has its own creative rhythm, you know, you can't force it. At least I don't. I know there are other writers who sit down religiously every morning, they take their espresso, they put a clean sheet of paper there and they sit looking at that paper until they've finished or covered at least a number of those pages. No, I'm not like that. I have to be ready. It has to gestate it for quite a while and then it's ready to burst forth.

And you talk about completing a play, is it complete until it's performed?

Wole Soyinka: That's again a good question but then, for many playwrights, they write the plays anyway because they've got to be, the work has been started, it's got to be finished, but we all long, I think, to see the plays fleshed out on stage and I'm exactly like that. Yes, I'm not satisfied until I actually see it on stage.

Is that part of your African tradition? Because obviously you're writing for very diverse audiences and audiences with diverse literary capacities. Some of your audiences may be completely illiterate. Is it important to you that you reach all of those audiences and is theatre a strong vehicle for that?

Wole Soyinka: That's where I think those of us who work in the theatre have an advantage over the novelists and the prose writers and, to some extent, those who write only poetry. With theatre, you can interpret the most complex play on stage for it have meaning to an audience because you're dealing in images, you're dealing in action, you can use different idioms to interpret and clarify something which is obscured in the reading and of course there are different kinds of play, there are mythological plays, there are what I call the dramatic sketches, direct political theatre which is virtually everybody, but I find that you can use the stage as a social vehicle, you know, which any kind of audience.

And when you have already the tradition of theatre in your society and we have these travelling companies, we call them folk opera companies, they travel all over the place in a lorry; they arrive there in the morning, they drum, dance around the town to announce their presence. In the evening, to say where the venue will be, it can be just an improvised hall. By evening everybody's already, you know, swarming in that direction so the tradition of theatre already exists in my society and that is an advantage.

Does it give you a special joy to have your work performed in front of a Nigerian audience, say the Orubo audience?

> I come alive when I have assisted in bringing out the printed word on the stage …

Wole Soyinka: Joy is not the word, I don't think, it's just that's my occupation, you know, I come alive, let's put it that way, I come alive when I have assisted in bringing out the printed word on the stage, you know, and I enjoy directing plays. It's a tactile process, theatre, unlike a number of other forms of the creative work.

You talk about diverse audiences, diverse influences?

Wole Soyinka: My understanding of the creative process is simply that all cultures and all concerns meet at a certain point, the human point in which everything is related to one another. That has been my creative experience. I never know who's influencing me at any time. I mean, I can take a play by Brecht and adapt it, I'm consciously adapting that play, or, as I've done with the Greek classics, Euripides and Oedipus, and I'm consciously adapting that play. Whether it influences me or not, I think it's the critics, the analysts who have to decide that. Me, I don't feel that I'm under the influence of any such sources.

But you have rather diverse forms. If you look at something like myth literature in the African world, you analyse and deconstruct those different belief systems, those different structures.

Wole Soyinka: My interest in culture generally is a comparative one, comparative one, and I think that's where the word joy, I think, can be applicable. There's joy in actually seeing the relatedness, the connectedness of different cultures or recognising, for instance, your own culture in another or another culture in your own culture and feeling an air to all of them.

You draw lots on your Yoruba culture, you draw a lot on Ogun, you draw a lot on the cosmology of your people. How does that distinguish your work from other writers?

Wole Soyinka: Mythology can be used, and has been used, even to re-state, you know, the very urgent problems of the world. At a reading which we had, Derek Walcott, Nadine Gordimer, Toni Morrison … Once Derek Walcott read a play of his which is based on the Cyclops myth. Intensely political play with direct correlation and purpose to the Greek tyranny in the episode of the Greek General, but I also rarely use mythology for its own sake because, as a theatre person, the mythological figures are in fact humanity to the ninth degree and Yoruba mythology in particular has fascination of being one of the most humanised mythologies in the world.

The gods in Yoruba mythology are not remote at all. They're benign, they're malign, they are mischievous, like Eshu for instance, tricksters, rascally, fornicators, that's a similarity to Greek mythology, for instance, you know. They're not saints, they're not saints. They're powerful. It's why they're not tyrannical. Of course, a number of them are also very, you know, benevolent, you know, there are saintly virtues to be found in them. In other words, you have the entire gamut of human experience captured in the mythology of the Yoruba. This is what makes the Yoruba mythology a natural source material for me in my creative endeavours.

Do you feel a duty, do you feel bound to give a voice to your community? Yesterday at the reading you talked about reinforcing the civic voice.

Wole Soyinka: Yes, I do. I do, but I were part company with certain schools of writers that I do not believe that it is necessarily the duty of the writer. I don't believe that. If a writer is true to his vocation, to his or her vocation, the very process of creativity enlarges these human horizons. It provides insights, even when you're not writing, when your writing's not dealing with a concrete political situation.

The very function of creativity, of the elaboration of the human condition only enlarges the human spirit and, I mean, as a writer I don't want to read political literature all the time. It would be terribly boring and, you know, abrasive, but just reading the insights, you know, partaking of the insights of a writer into phenomena, into society, into human relationships, both on a micro level and on a macro level, is already a function. For me, a writer is already being the deuce of his mission, his occupation to society. But I happen to be unfortunately temperamental. No, my temperament is also, what you describe to rainfalls, the will of society, to combat a number of contradictions. That happens to be my creative temperament.

When did these issues move away from specific to universal?
Wole Soyinka: I think all, well … no, let me correct what I was about to say. I'm very conscious when I'm being specific, like my street theatre, my guerrilla theatre for instance. It's created and the themes and the methodology of the delivery of the content is specific. It's to an immediate issue. But when I sit down to craft a play or a novel or a poem, I'm now dealing more consciously, perhaps, perhaps, on more universal issues. But even those specific issues contain sometimes universal applications, so I don't say I'm only going to be specific but what motivates that particular work at that moment is a specific issue and I try to address it as much as possible.

To move onto the Nobel Prize, 1986, the first African writer to get the Nobel Prize.
Wole Soyinka: In literature.

In literature. Tell us about the event. Did you have intimations beforehand? How did it all come about?
Wole Soyinka: No. Not only didn't I have any intimations, I was extremely irritated the year before by speculations in the Nigerian media. I mean, it really boiled up to a hysterical pitch. I believe that prizes are useful, you know, are useful things for the disciplines, whether we are talking about chemistry or we're talking … It motivates, it, you know, inspires, it encourages and it brings, in the case of literature, it brings literature, the arts, it brings the arts out of the ghetto, out of the ghetto. People respond … "Oh there's a prize for this? Oh yes. Oh, I must take a look into that."

But as a matter of fact, I was nominating other writers. During that period where, in my group, the institution to which I belonged, we moved between … and Senghor, Léopold Senghor, and I frankly thought that one or the other was going to get it and we were going to celebrate with them. So my mind was never at any time, at any time, you know, on the notion of considering myself as a candidate just, you know, because I had other writers I loved, and not just African writers. I mean, like, I'm a consumer of literature and so I had candidates quite apart from even the African candidates whom I thought, you know, who are going to get it before they got to me at all. So it was quite a shock and a surprise. Pleasant one, but the shock was the same.

The event itself, your Nobel Lecture, you used the platform, it was a very overtly political speech. It was a very powerful lecture and there was, among the more conservative elements in society, there was some grumbling about using that platform for such an overtly, and I come from South Africa and of course at that time the reaction was fantastic because it really put the apartheid government into a flap, you know, it disturbed them.

> I felt my racial fount was being sullied and insulted as long as, you know, the apartheid situation existed. …

Wole Soyinka: I have been obsessed by South Africa since, oh, way back. My very first play which was put on at the Royal Court Theatre in London as a student, I wrote it as a student, was called 'The Invention' and it was a racial thing but I felt my racial fount was being sullied and insulted as long as, you know, the apartheid situation existed. It just didn't make sense to me. There was no way I would not have used that platform, you know, I couldn't conceive. My mind immediately shot to South Africa the moment I sat down to think what I was going to write, what I was going to say. There was no other choice.

I wasn't interested in discussing my craft. I mean, South Africa had always been mixed up with my work, with my literature, so you can talk about South Africa, I am talking about my work, my play 'The Invention', other poems I had written, the very issue of creativity. I was speaking about the whole fate of literature, the exiled South African writers with whom I used to mix in London and other places. /—/, Lewis Nkosi, /—/ etcetera. I mean, for me this was literature. I had no ambiguity at all about what I was going to say. I wasn't that I felt it was my duty. No, it was just my literature.

Do you think that that lecture had a powerful influence? Do you think that it has contributed towards changing things?
Wole Soyinka: You know, I was so impressed when you said just now that it really had the South African government in a flap. I didn't follow, you know, up the consequences or whatever, I was always more interested in looking forward to the day when, as I wrote in another article, I would present a copy of Mandela's poems, 'Mandela's World and other poems', and I swore that one day I was going to present it to him in his living room and read him one or two poems.

So once I'd given that speech, well for me, I was more interested in doing other things in the same connection and maybe that and the work of others, cumulative effect, political bargaining. I wrote, if you remember Ogun Abibima which was a construction of Ogun, moving down to the south to join hands with Shaka, both mythological figures, one is real of course but in a sense, two ancestral figures, you know, joining hands to go down and smash apartheid and I wrote this epic of projection … so I just went back to my work, I continued my work.

How has being a Nobel Prize Laureate affected your work, your writing, your creative space?
Wole Soyinka: Let me again cite Bernard Shaw, who is reputed to have said that, when he was given the Nobel Prize, that he could forgive the man who invented dynamite but it took the most diabolical mind in the world to invent the Nobel Prize for Literature. I agree with that to a certain extent because it swelled my constituency. It was already sufficiently, you know, swollen because I've always, you know, agitated on the world stage one way or the other but it really made life virtually impossible. It's with astonishment that I discover that I've actually completed a new work, you know, ever since the Nobel I would sit down and look at it like some strange object … Oh, did I really manage to finish this?

So it's mixed with … Of course I've enjoyed having the Nobel Prize, the prestige that goes along with it, the money that came with it in particular. I was the typical, still am to some extent, impecunious writer, you know, just struggling to make ends meet, so that, you know, nobody's going to deny that at all. In fact, if they want to give it to me a second time, I'm standing by, ready to receive it, but as I said now, it's a problem, it's a real problem and then expectations and then you have monsters like Sani Abacha who come up from time to time and who would have died a happy man if he'd succeeded in hanging a Nobel Laureate for literature. I mean, that's a fact and it can be attested by some of his close associates so it brings, in this particular case it brought certain additional risks when it should have been what most people correctly think, a kind of protection.

It's a new century. You're writing 'Climate of Fear', you're addressing very current issues. You're addressing a new threat. Can you tell us a little bit about the last lecture in here 'I am right, you are dead', it talks about intolerance.

Yes, intolerance has become, I think, the reigning ideology of the world today …

Wole Soyinka: Yes, intolerance has become, I think, the reigning ideology of the world today, the intolerance versus intolerance and it's taken on lethal proportions. I mean, intolerance has always been with us, you know. The moment you have ideology, we have intolerance, whether it's the secular ideology or, you know ideocratic ideology, which always brings with it some kind of intolerance. But the sense of self assuredness that, you know, ideologists, you have all the structure of the world in your hand, whether you're viewing it from material world or from the extra terrestrial lofty position and it's become accentuated because of genuine as well as perceived injustices.

Religion has really spawned some monsters. It always has, historically. Go all the way back to the Inquisition, you know, the Crusades, the Jehad and so on. It's all based on the mentality of "I'm right", but now today it's moved from even the question of "I'm right and I'm willing to tolerate those who agree that I am right or those who don't disturb me anyway". Now, it's a question of "If you do not accept that I'm right, I have a right to kill you". That is the mentality of religious fundamentalism today. That is the meaning of the kind of terror which we are witnessing today, that everybody is expendable who do not actually physically line up behind me.

And one of the most distressing aspects of this is to see that kind of mentality also manifested by the leadership of so called democratic countries, and I refer specifically to the United States of America, where the President uses a kind of language which becomes indistinguishable from that of Osama Bin Laden. "I'm right, it doesn't matter whether the world thinks I am wrong, I know that I am divinely ordered to do this". It's that kind of language, that's the language of intolerance, intolerance of opinion – those who are not with us are against us, you know. And this is, of course, we've got to be honest, that the more dangerous is that of religious

fundamentalism, those who feel that, you know, the kind which led to Beslan, one of the most horrendous chapters of Iraq's contemporary experience. That really, I think, has reached, has breached the very barriers of the unimaginable.

People seem to have a very short memory for history, that things recur over and over again in an endless cycle. Do you think that your role as a writer is to try and help people to understand, to deconstruct history?

Wole Soyinka: Whenever that is possible, I consider it my duty to do. Whenever circumstances point, reactions, events point to this short changing of memory, then I think it is the duty of the writer to say: Look, the material we're working on, whether citizens or writers, is not new, you know, and to bring the mind back and see that there's a repetition of this cycle of stupidity. I think I've used that expression somewhere else before and to think now why do we have to tread the same spores over and over again? It's almost a kind of self defense. You're saying you're making my work as a writer difficult for me because you're not paying attention, you're not recollecting and I have to keep reminding you, so yes, I think even from the point of view of self defense, one must bring up, you know, pull up memories from where it's short changed.

Finally, you teach as well, you have young aspiring writers. In short, what do they have to do?

Wole Soyinka: I always tell them get ready a basket first of all, in which to collect all your rejection slips and you must continue until that basket is full or your work is accepted. In other words, you just must continue writing; and once you accept that, then we can talk about what you want to write insofar as I can assist. I'm not a very good teacher of creative writing and I always warn them about that. What I teach is literary criticism and comparative literature and so on and that's my function, but from time to time it's possible for me actually to help a writer. I read something and something strikes me then, I feel I can talk to that writer about it.

But over and above all, I also tell them don't get carried away by the ideologs. Don't feel that you have to tailor your literature a particular way to please any school of ideology. There will emerge in its own right, effortlessly, some kind of ideological direction which is a reflection of your thinking and you want your thinking, above all. We wasted a lot of creative energy in that immediate post colonial era, when there was a struggle between, you know, the Cold War between the capitalism and communism. Many writers just wasted their energy and their talent because they want to be ideologically correct and of course all they produced was propaganda. Absolute tawdry uninteresting, oh, full of excitation, yes, you know, full of ra-ra-ra but they were short changing their own talent and I used to tell them and now that they've become ideological orphans, they're now trying to recover their own true voice and have produced some very good work but they could have produced excellent work and at the same time, you know, be truthful to their ideological convictions if they hadn't allowed that ideology to take primary place and that's what I tell all writers.

Great. Professor Soyinka, thank you very much indeed. Been a real pleasure to speak to you.
Wole Soyinka: Thank you.

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PRESS RELEASE

Swedish Academy
The Permanent Secretary

Press release
October 1986

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1986
Wole Soyinka

This year's Nobel Prize in literature goes to an African writer, Wole Soyinka from Nigeria. Now in his early fifties, he has a large and richly varied literary production behind him and is in his prime as an author.

His background, upbringing and education have given him unusual conditions for a literary career. He has his roots in the Yoruba people's myths, rites and cultural patterns, which in their turn have historical links to the Mediterranean region. Through his education in his native land and in Europe he has also acquired deep familiarity with western culture. His collection of essays *Myth, Literature and the African World* make for clarifying and enriching reading.

The learning that the professor of literary science bears with him is in no way an encumbrance to his literary works. They are vivid, often harrowing, but are also marked by en evocative, poetically intensified diction. Soyinka has been characterized as one of the finest poetical playwrights that have written in English.

Among his plays special mention can be made of *A Dance of the Forests* and *Death and the King's Horseman.* The former is a kind of African *Midsummer Night's Dream* with spirits, ghosts and gods. There is a distinct link here to the indigenous ritual drama and to the Elizabethan drama. A key figure in Soyinka, the god Ogun, also appears in the play. He is both creator and destroyer and as Soyinka sees him has traits that lead

one's thoughts to the Dionysian, the Apollonian and the Promethean in European tradition.

Death and the King's Horseman is in the nature of an antique tragedy with the cultic sacrificial death as theme. The relationship between the unborn, the living and the dead, to which Soyinka reverts several times in his works, is fashioned here with very strong effect. Soyinka confirms his position as a centre of force in drama.

In a play such as *A Play of Giants* we find another side to Soyinka. It is a dark farce, an aggressive writer's thrust in the service of common sense. The introductory piece of prose is a caustic summing up of Africa's agony.

It has already been mentioned that Soyinka's plays have strong poetical elements. In several collections of poems, he has also appeared as a poet of great distinction. One of the highlights is *Idanre, and Other Poems*, in which a central theme is the very thing that Ogun represents: the conflict, perhaps the union, between destruction and creation.

The collection of poems *A Shuttle in the Crypt* shows real moral stature. The poems were written during the writer's two years in prison, to which he was sent because of his attitude in his country's civil war. They are poems about mental survival, human contact, anger and forgiveness. The same experiences lie behind his prose work *The Man Died: Prison Notes*, which in itself is a literary work of the first rank.

Linguistically too Soyinka stands out as excellent. He possesses a prolific store of words and expressions which he exploits to the full in witty dialogue, in satire and grotesquery, in quiet poetry and essays of sparkling vitality.

Wole Soyinka's writing is full of life and urgency. For all its complexity it is at the same time energetically coherent.

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Poetry

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1986/soyinka/poetry/

The 1986 Nobel Laureate in Literature Wole Soyinka reads his poem 'Lost Poems' from "Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known". The video was recorded at Harvard University in April, 2005.

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PROSE

Excerpt from *Aké. The Years of Childhood*

(Pages 25-28)

Mr Olagbaju's bachelor house behind the school became a second lunch-hour home. His favourite food appeared to be the pounded yam, *iyan*, at which I soon became his keen accomplice. Through the same *iyan*, I made my first close school friend, Osiki, simply by discovering that he was an even more ardent lover of the pounded yam than either Mr Olagbaju or I. It seemed a simple matter of course that I should take him home or to Mr Olagbaju's whenever the meal was *iyan*; moreover, Mr Olagbaju was also teaching me to play *ayo*,** and this required a partner to play with. It was with some surprise that I heard my mother remark:

'This one is going to be like his father. He brings home friends at meal-times without any notice.'

I saw nothing to remark in it at all; it was the most natural thing in the world to bring a friend home at his favourite meal-time. So Osiki became an inseparable companion and a regular feature of the house, especially on *iyan* days. One of the house helps composed a song on him:

Osiki oko oniyan
A ti nwa e, a ko ri e***

which she began singing as soon as we appeared, hand in hand, on the path leading from the school. But the pounded yam was also to provide the first test of our friendship.

There were far too many aspects of the schoolroom and the compound to absorb in the regular school hours, moreover, an empty schoolroom appeared to acquire a totally different character which changed from day to day. And so, new discoveries began to keep me behind at lunch-time after everyone had gone. I began to stay longer and longer, pausing over objects which became endowed with new meanings, forms, even dimensions as soon as silence descended on their environment. Sometimes I simply wandered off among the rocks intending merely to climb a challenging surface when no one was around. Finally, Osiki lost patience. He would usually wait for me at home even while Tinu had her own food. On this day however, being perhaps more hungry than usual, Osiki decided not to wait. Afterwards he tried to explain that he had only meant to eat half of the food but had been unable to stop himself. I returned home to encounter empty dishes and was just in time to see Osiki disappearing behind the croton bush in the backyard, meaning no doubt to escape through the rear gate. I rushed through the parlour and the front room, empty dishes in hand, hid behind the door until he came past, then pelted him with the dishes. A chase followed, with Osiki instantly in front by almost the full length of the school compound while I followed doggedly, inconsolable at the sight of the increasing gap, yet unable to make my legs emulate Osiki's pace.

Finally, I stopped. I no longer saw Osiki but – Speed, Swiftness! I had not given any thought before then to the phenomenon of human swiftness and

Osiki's passage through the compound seemed little short of the magical. The effect of his *dansiki* which flowed like wings from his sides also added to the illusion of him flying over the ground. This, more than anything else, made it easy enough for the quarrel to be settled by my mother. It was very difficult to cut oneself off from a school friend who could fly at will from one end of the compound to the other. Even so, some weeks elapsed before he returned to the pounded-yam table, only to follow up his perfidy by putting me out of school for the first time in my career.

There was a birthday party for one of the Canon's children. Only the children of the parsonage were expected but I passed the secret to Osiki and he turned up at the party in his best *buba*. The entertain ments had been set up out of doors in front of the house. I noticed that one of the benches was not properly placed, so that it acted like a see-saw when we sat on it close to the two ends. It was an obvious idea for a game, so, with the help of some of the other children, we carried it to an even more uneven ground, rested its middle leg on a low rock outcrop and turned it into a proper see-saw. We all took turns to ride on it.

For a long time it all went without mishap. Then Osiki got carried away. He was a bigger boy than I, so that I had to exert a lot of energy to raise him up, lifting myself on both hands and landing with all possible weight on my seat. Suddenly, while he was up in his turn, it entered his head to do the same. The result was that I was catapulted up very sharply while he landed with such force that the leg of the bench broke on his side. I was flung in the air, sailed over his head and saw, for one long moment, the Canon's square residence rushing out to meet me.

It was only after I had landed that I took much notice of what I had worn to the party. It was a yellow silk *dansiki*, and I now saw with some surprise that it had turned a bright crimson, though not yet entirely. But the remaining yellow was rapidly taking on the new colour. My hair on the left side was matted with blood and dirt and, just before the afternoon was shut out and I fell asleep, I wondered if it was going to be possible to squeeze the blood out of the *dansiki* and pump it back through the gash which I had located beneath my hair.

The house was still and quiet when I woke up. One moment there had been the noise, the shouts and laughter and the bumpy ride of the see-saw, now silence and semi-darkness and the familiar walls of mother's bedroom. Despite mishaps, I reflected that there was something to be said for birthdays and began to look forward to mine. My only worry now was whether I would have recovered sufficiently to go to school and invite all my friends. Sending Tinu seemed a risky business, she might choose to invite all her friends and pack my birthday with girls I hardly even knew or played with. Then there was another worry. I had noticed that some of the pupils had been kept back in my earlier class and were still going through the same lessons as we had all learnt during my first year in school. I developed a fear that if I remained too long at home, I would also be sent back to join them. When I thought again of all the blood I had lost, it seemed to me that I might actually be bed-ridden for the rest of the year. Everything depended on whether or not the blood on my *dansiki* had been

saved up and restored to my head. I raised it now and turned towards the mirror; it was difficult to tell because of the heavy bandage but, I felt quite certain that my head had not shrunk to any alarming degree.

The bedroom door opened and mother peeped in. Seeing me awake she entered, and was followed in by father. When I asked for Osiki, she gave me a peculiar look and turned to say something to father. I was not too sure, but it sounded as if she wanted father to tell Osiki that killing me was not going to guarantee him my share of *iyan*. I studied their faces intently as they asked me how I felt, if I had a headache or a fever and if I would like some tea. Neither would touch on the crucial question, so finally I decided to put an end to my suspense. I asked them what they had done with my *dansiki*.

'It's going to be washed,' mother said, and began to crush a halftablet in a spoon for me to take.

'What did you do with the blood?'

She stopped, they looked at each other. Father frowned a little and reached forward to place his hand on my forehead. I shook my head anxiously, ignoring the throb of pain this provoked.

'Have you washed it away?' I persisted.

Again they looked at each other. Mother seemed about to speak but fell silent as my father raised his hand and sat on the bed, close to my head. Keeping his eyes on me he drew out a long, 'No-o-o-o-o.'

I sank back in relief. 'Because, you see, you mustn't. It wouldn't matter if I had merely cut my hand or stubbed my toe or something like that – not much blood comes out when that happens. But I saw this one, it was too much. And it comes from my head. So, you must squeeze it out and pump it back into my head. That way I can go back to school at once.'

My father nodded agreement, smiling. 'How did you know that was the right thing to do?'

I looked at him in some surprise, 'But everybody knows.'

Then he wagged his finger at me, 'Ah-ha, but what you don't know is that we have already done it. It's all back in there, while you were asleep. I used Dipo's feeding-bottle to pour it back.'

I was satisfied. 'I'll be ready for school tomorrow' I announced.

** A game played on a wooden board with dug-out holes, and seeds. *** Osiki, lord of the pounded-yam seller we have sought you everywhere but failed to find you.

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VIDEOS

01] Wole Soyinka: How the United States revoked my visa

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ple4xophXfM [26:06]

The United States government has revoked the non-immigrant visa of Wole Soyinka, the Nobel laureate.

In a letter dated October 23 and signed by the US consulate-general in Lagos, Soyinka was directed to present his passport at the consulate for physical cancellation of the visa.

Soyinka spoke during a media parley held in Lagos on Tuesday, where he read excerpts from the official correspondence sent to him. Soyinka made reference to how he discarded his US green card after President Donald Trump assumed office in his first term.

The Nobel laureate said he wondered whether his visa was revoked because he described Trump as "Idi Amin in white face".

"It is necessary for me to give this press conference so that people in the United States who are expecting me for their event, not to waste their time. I have no desire," he said.

02] In conversation with Prof. Wole Soyinka

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXD74LdaJho [16:08]

Prof. Wole Soyinka is a towering figure in the literary world, renowned for his exceptional literary works, activism, and intellectual contributions. Born in Nigeria in 1934, Soyinka's literary journey began early in life, with his debut novel, "The Man Died: Prison Notes," published in 1972, documenting his experiences during imprisonment for his opposition to the Nigerian government during the Nigerian Civil War. In 1986, Soyinka became the first African laureate to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

03] Professor Wole Soyinka Reacts as US Revokes His Visa

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYZJyeLJJk0 [25:30]

04] Talking Books Africa Ep.12: Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka in conversation with Tarari Kalango

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPWbdVC11DA [1:09:221]

05] Soyinka To Trump: Nigeria Fights Extremists+ Bwala Says Nigeria's Crime Rate Lower Than U.S.|OjyOkpe

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLGnC4w_124 [37:09]

Nobel Laureate Professor Wole Soyinka challenged Trump's narrative, insisting the conflict in Nigeria is not a "Christian-Muslim" war but a struggle against extremist groups like ISWAP and Boko Haram, who weaponize religion for gain, killing both Muslims and Christians.

Presidential spokesman Daniel Bwala intensified his pushback, arguing the Tinubu administration has made significant security progress and controversially claimed insecurity is actually worse in the United States than in Nigeria.

Prominent televangelist Apostle Michael Olowookere, who alleged the roots of targeted attacks on Christians stretch back decades, while international organizations like Catholic Arena and Open Doors, cited alarming statistics including 3,100 Christian killings in their last reporting period, and the systemic persecution of Christian due to Sharia Law in 12 Northern States.

Armed gunmen in military uniforms carried out coordinated attacks on travelers along major highways in Kogi and Kwara States, involving shootings and kidnappings, revealing a systematic pattern designed to paralyze movement and instill fear.

The use of military uniforms undermines public confidence in security forces.

The nation marked the 30th anniversary of the execution of environmental activist and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight (November 10, 1995.

Executed under the military regime of General Sani Abacha, their martyrdom highlighted the struggle against environmental degradation and human rights abuses in the Niger Delta, a struggle that remains unfinished.

Arise News celebrates International Correspondent, Adefemi Akinsanya on the occasion of her 35th birthday.

06] Writer Wole Soyinka: Using Reality Against Reality | Louisiana Channel

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UstkUznJVO4 [24:56]

"You can build atomic bombs, and you can build space rockets, but you cannot replicate the essence or transition from one zone of being to the other. It's this luminous area where we find the images of imagination." Wole Soyinka – the first Black African recipient of the Nobel Prize – reflects on his life and work.

Wole Soyinka grew up "in a mish-mash of images, sound, textures" and became aware that he "might be a creative person" when he was five. He began to read when he was two, already fascinated by the printed word.

"I related the stories the others used to tell us –folk tales, morality tales – to what I was reading," Soyinka began to imitate and retell these stories – "I think it was the first time I began to show signs of my creativity", he says.

At the center of his work lies a belief in the human imagination." You can build atomic bombs, you can build space rockets but you cannot replicate the essence of transition from one zone of being to the other. It's this luminous area where we find the images of imagination. This applies also

to the arts, applies also to music, in my view, and it applies just to the greatest works of art", Soyinka states.

"And when any effort is made to desecrate, especially to manipulate it for material ends, for petty quarrels, it seems that humanity itself is betrayed. That's really, I think, why I keep returning to that in several of my works", Soyinka says.

Wole Soyinka believes in art and explains it's essence this way: "Art, for me, is so generous and undertaking. It makes you have your cake and eat it. For the simple reason that art begins in reality. We can talk about fantasy, we can even talk about science fiction, we can talk about illusions, nightmares, hallucinations, but everything begins in reality."

When Soyinka says "we can have our cake and eat it" it means that "we can use that reality to against itself. We can imagine what happens if that reality were not exactly so. And then without art, we begin to give reality dimensions that were hitherto unsuspected. It just loosens the mind."

Wole Soyinka compares literature and art with religion: "With religion, you ask questions about what exists beyond the surface. And in this case, beyond the human mind, beyond the human sensibility: what exists beyond it. And it's the same thing in relation to a tree. What exists beyond the tree? And so one posits for that tree new existences, new realities, and you can use the same methodology, the same approach to the conduct of human beings, especially when it comes to its power. What is it about that individual that makes an individual think that he or she has the right of control over other beings? This is how we say, from the art to the politics of existence," Wole Soyinka concludes.

Wole Soyinka (b. 1934, Nigeria) is a playwright, a novelist and a poet and holds a Ph.D. at the University of Leeds. Soyinka has beem a dramaturgist at the Royal Court Theatre in London between 1958 and 1959. In 1960, he was awarded a Rockefeller bursary and returned to Nigeria to study African drama. At the same time, he taught drama and literature at various universities in Ibadan, Lagos, and Ife, where, since 1975, he has been a professor of comparative literature. In 1960, he founded the theatre group "The 1960 Masks" and in 1964, the "Orisun Theatre Company", in which he produced his own plays and took part as an actor. During the civil war in Nigeria, Soyinka appealed in an article for a cease-fire. For this he was arrested in 1967, accused of conspiring with the Biafra rebels, and was held as a political prisoner for 22 months untill 1969. Soyinka has published about 20 works: drama, novels and poetry.

Soyinka has written three novels, "The Interpreters" (1965), narratively, a complicated work which has been compared to Joyce's and Faulkner's, in which six Nigerian intellectuals discuss and interpret their African experiences, and "Season of Anomy" (1973) which is based on the writer's thoughts during his imprisonment and confronts the Orpheus and Euridice myth with the mythology of the Yoruba. In 2021 Soyinka released "Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth" combining

"elements of a murder mystery, a searing political satire and an Alice in Wonderland-like modern allegory of power and deceit" (Los Angeles Times).

Wole Soyinka received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986 as the first Black African writer.

Wole Soyinka was interviewed by Lotte Folke Kaarsholm at the Louisiana Literature festival in August 2023, at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark.

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Awards

Year	Honor	Notes
1983	RSL Fellow	Elected by the Royal Society of Literature.
	Anisfield-Wolf Book Award	For his autobiography, *Ake: The Years of Childhood*.
1986	Nobel Prize in Literature	For Soyinka's literary works.
	Eni Enrico Mattei Prize for the Humanities	Funded by Agip.
	Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic	Awarded by Ibrahim Babangida; The award is the second highest national honour of Nigeria.
1999	Benson Medal	Awarded by the Royal Society of Literature.
2009	Golden Plate Award	Given by the American Academy of Achievement, this award was presented to Soyinka by Archbishop Desmond Tutu at an awards ceremony at St. George's Cathedral, Cape Town, South Africa.
2013	Lifetime Achievement Award	Part of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards.
2014	International Humanist Award	Awarded by International Humanist and Ethical Union (presently called Humanists International).
2017	"Special Prize", Europe Theatre Prize	Given by the European Commission to a person, according to them, who has "contributed to the realisation of cultural events that promote understanding and the exchange of knowledge between peoples".

Honorary Degrees

- University of Leeds, 1973
- Yale University, 1980
- University of Toronto, 1992
- Harvard University, 1993
- Emory University, 1996
- SOAS University of London, 2002
- Princeton University, 2005
- Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, 2018
- University of Cambridge, 2022

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Wole Soyinka

Imprisoned during Nigeria's Biafra war

{https://www.bbc.com/audio/play/w3ct74k8}

[10:20]

In 1967, Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka tried to stop the country's Biafra war, in which Nigeria's Igbo people responded to violence by seceding from the rest of the country. They proclaimed a new Republic of Biafra.

When the fighting began, Soyinka was building a reputation as a poet and playwright abroad. However, in a last-ditch attempt to avert civil war, he set off on a secret mission behind the front line to meet the Biafran leader, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. When he left Biafra, he was imprisoned by the federal government without trial for more than two years.

Soyinka drew on his prison experience in his writing over the following years, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986 - the first African to win the award. He looks back on those events with Ben Henderson.

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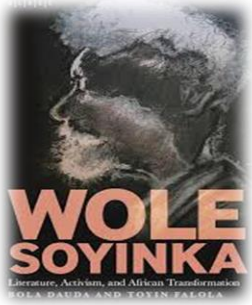

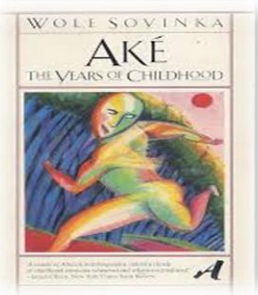

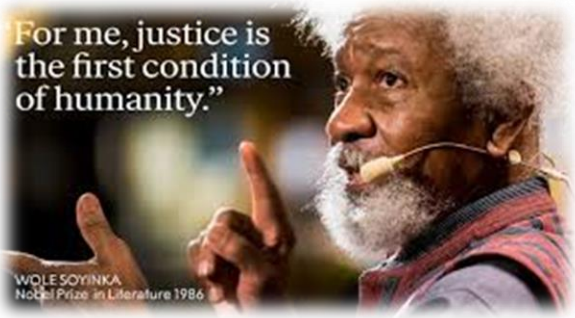

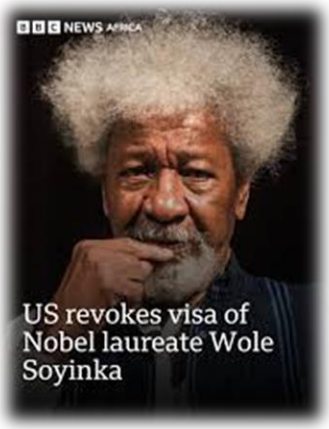

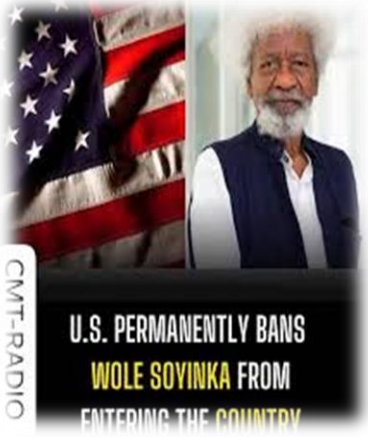

24 May 1940

28 Jan 1996

Joseph Brodsky

Nobel Prize in Literature 1987

Born: 24 May 1940, Leningrad, USSR (now St. Petersburg, Russia)
Died: 28 January 1996, New York, NY, USA
Residence at the time of the award: USA

Prize motivation:

"for an all-embracing authorship,
imbued with clarity of thought
and poetic intensity"

Language: English; Russian
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1987/brodsky/facts/}

Links to other sites

[01] On Joseph Brodsky from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] On Joseph Brodsky from The Academy of American Poets

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Professor Sture Allén, of the Swedish Academy,
December 10, 1987

Translation from the Swedish text

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A characteristic feature of the Nobel prizewinner Joseph Brodsky is a magnificent joy of discovery. He sees connections, words them pithily, sees new connections. Not seldom they are contradictory and ambiguous, often caught in a flash like this: “Memory, I think, is a substitute for the tail we lost for good in the happy process of evolution. It directs our movements …”.

In the remarkable writings to which the Swedish Academy has drawn attention this year, poetry as the highest manifestation of life is a theme throughout. It is developed with a poetic brilliance combined with both intellectual beauty and linguistic mastery.

Brodsky is nowadays an American citizen but he was born and grew up in Leningrad, or Peter as he calls the city after its old name of Petersburg. It is a setting in which Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoyevsky worked, and it is a setting whose architecture and ornaments – even in the war-damaged state of the 1940s and 1950s – relate an essential part of the history of our world.

The poet belongs to the classical Russian tradition with names such as Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova and the Nobel prizewinner Boris Pasternak. At the same time he is a virtuoso renewer of the poetical means of expression. Inspiration comes also from the West, especially the English-language poetry from the metaphysician John Donne to Robert Frost and Wystan Auden.

Latterly Brodsky has begun also to write in English. For him Russian and English are two attitudes to the world. Having both languages at one’s disposal is like sitting on the top of an existential hill with a view over two slopes, over humanity’s two tendencies of development, he has declared. The east-west background has given him an unusual thematic richness and a multitude of perspectives. Together with the writer’s thorough insight into the culture of former epochs it has also conjured up a grand historical vision.

Brodsky has experienced what it means to live. “Life … / bares its teeth in a grin at each / encounter.” Through all hardships – trial, internal banishment, exile – he has retained his integrity and his faith in literature and language. There are criteria for human behaviour, he says, which come not from society but from literature.

The poet plays a key part as examiner, tester and questioner. Poetry becomes the decisive counterweight against time, the principle of deformation. The poet also becomes the spokesman in the totalitarian society's apparent silence and the open society's stupefying flood of information.

Although Brodsky has defined his standpoint distinctly, political disputes are not prominent in him. The problem is raised to a more general level: man's duty is to live his own life, not a life determined by the categories and norms of others. "Freedom / is when you forget the spelling of the tyrant's name …"

What could be more natural for a writer than to wrestle with the phenomenon of language? This struggle with his own tool is very intense in Brodsky's case. It marks his view of poetry and the poet: "Reading [Dostoyevsky] simply makes one realize that stream of consciousness springs not from consciousness but from a word which alters or redirects one's consciousness". The ultimate power, he maintains, is "the omnivorousness of his language which eventually comes to a point where it cannot be satisfied with God, man, reality, guilt, death, infinity, salvation … and then it takes on itself."

Brodsky's view of language also characterizes his view of states and societies: "For empires are held together by neither political nor military forces but by languages. – Empires are, first and foremost, cultural entities; and it's language that does the job, not legions."

Language of course provides material for metaphors in poetry: "Late evening in Lithuania. / People drift home from mass, hiding the commas / of candles in parentheses of hands".

For Brodsky poetry stands out as a divine gift. The religious dimension that undeniably is to be found in his writings adheres, however, to no particular creed. Metaphysical and ethical questions are paramount, not doctrines.

Style and mood alternate in this richly orchestrated poetry. Here is the profound cultural analysis in the essays side by side with the rollicking ironies in the poem *History of the Twentieth Century*. Yet, for Joseph Brodsky poetry, even in its mirthful moments, is deadly earnest.

Dear Mr. Brodsky,

It has been my privilege and pleasure to introduce you to the audience in my native tongue. The gist of what I have said is contained, as it were, in a line from one of your recent poems: "Let me tell you: you are okay". In fact, you yourself belong to the history of the Twentieth Century alluded to. On behalf of the Swedish Academy I congratulate you on your remarkable achievements. May I ask you to

step forward to receive, from the hands of His Majesty the King, the Nobel Prize for Literature 1987.

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Nobel Prize Lecture

Nobel Lecture December 8, 1987

(Translation)

I

For someone rather private, for someone who all his life has preferred his private condition to any role of social significance, and who went in this preference rather far – far from his motherland to say the least, for it is better to be a total failure in democracy than a martyr or the crème de la crème in tyranny – for such a person to find himself all of a sudden on this rostrum is a somewhat uncomfortable and trying experience.

This sensation is aggravated not so much by the thought of those who stood here before me as by the memory of those who have been bypassed by this honor, who were not given this chance to address 'urbi et orbi', as they say, from this rostrum and whose cumulative silence is sort of searching, to no avail, for release through this speaker.

The only thing that can reconcile one to this sort of situation is the simple realization that – for stylistic reasons, in the first place – one writer cannot speak for another writer, one poet for another poet especially; that had Osip Mandelstam, or Marina Tsvetaeva, or Robert Frost, or Anna Akhmatova, or Wystan Auden stood here, they couldn't have helped but speak precisely for themselves, and that they, too, might have felt somewhat uncomfortable.

These shades disturb me constantly; they are disturbing me today as well. In any case, they do not spur one to eloquence. In my better moments, I deem myself their sum total, though invariably inferior to any one of them individually. For it is not possible to better them on the page; nor is it possible to better them in actual life. And it is precisely their lives, no matter how tragic or bitter they were, that often move me – more often perhaps than the case should be – to regret the passage of time. If the next life exists – and I can no more deny them the possibility of eternal life than I can forget their existence in this one – if the next world does exist, they will, I hope, forgive me and the quality of what I am about to utter: after all, it is not one's conduct on the podium which dignity in our profession is measured by.

I have mentioned only five of them, those whose deeds and whose lot matter so much to me, if only because if it were not for them, I, both as a man and a writer, would

amount to much less; in any case, I wouldn't be standing here today. There were more of them, those shades – better still, sources of light: lamps? stars? – more, of course, than just five. And each one of them is capable of rendering me absolutely mute. The number of those is substantial in the life of any conscious man of letters; in my case, it doubles, thanks to the two cultures to which fate has willed me to belong. Matters are not made easier by thoughts about contemporaries and fellow writers in both cultures, poets, and fiction writers whose gifts I rank above my own, and who, had they found themselves on this rostrum, would have come to the point long ago, for surely they have more to tell the world than I do.

I will allow myself, therefore, to make a number of remarks here – disjointed, perhaps stumbling, and perhaps even perplexing in their randomness. However, the amount of time allotted to me to collect my thoughts, as well as my very occupation, will, or may, I hope, shield me, at least partially, against charges of being chaotic. A man of my occupation seldom claims a systematic mode of thinking; at worst, he claims to have a system – but even that, in his case, is borrowing from a milieu, from a social order, or from the pursuit of philosophy at a tender age. Nothing convinces an artist more of the arbitrariness of the means to which he resorts to attain a goal – however permanent it may be – than the creative process itself, the process of composition. Verse really does, in Akhmatova's words, grow from rubbish; the roots of prose are no more honorable.

II

If art teaches anything (to the artist, in the first place), it is the privateness of the human condition. Being the most ancient as well as the most literal form of private enterprise, it fosters in a man, knowingly or unwittingly, a sense of his uniqueness, of individuality, of separateness – thus turning him from a social animal into an autonomous "I". Lots of things can be shared: a bed, a piece of bread, convictions, a mistress, but not a poem by, say, Rainer Maria Rilke. A work of art, of literature especially, and a poem in particular, addresses a man tete-a-tete, entering with him into direct – free of any go-betweens – relations.

It is for this reason that art in general, literature especially, and poetry in particular, is not exactly favored by the champions of the common good, masters of the masses, heralds of historical necessity. For there, where art has stepped, where a poem has been read, they discover, in place of the anticipated consent and unanimity, indifference and polyphony; in place of the resolve to act, inattention and fastidiousness. In other words, into the little zeros with which the champions of the common good and the rulers of the masses tend to operate, art introduces a "period, period, comma, and a minus", transforming each zero into a tiny human, albeit not always pretty, face.

The great Baratynsky, speaking of his Muse, characterized her as possessing an "uncommon visage". It's in acquiring this "uncommon visage" that the meaning of human existence seems to lie, since for this uncommonness we are, as it were, prepared genetically. Regardless of whether one is a writer or a reader, one's task consists first of all in mastering a life that is one's own, not imposed or prescribed from without, no matter how noble its appearance may be. For each of us is issued but one life, and we know full well how it all ends. It would be regrettable to squander this one

chance on someone else's appearance, someone else's experience, on a tautology – regrettable all the more because the heralds of historical necessity, at whose urging a man may be prepared to agree to this tautology, will not go to the grave with him or give him so much as a thank-you.

Language and, presumably, literature are things that are more ancient and inevitable, more durable than any form of social organization. The revulsion, irony, or indifference often expressed by literature towards the state is essentially a reaction of the permanent – better yet, the infinite – against the temporary, against the finite. To say the least, as long as the state permits itself to interfere with the affairs of literature, literature has the right to interfere with the affairs of the state. A political system, a form of social organization, as any system in general, is by definition a form of the past tense that aspires to impose itself upon the present (and often on the future as well); and a man whose profession is language is the last one who can afford to forget this. The real danger for a writer is not so much the possibility (and often the certainty) of persecution on the part of the state, as it is the possibility of finding oneself mesmerized by the state's features, which, whether monstrous or undergoing changes for the better, are always temporary.

The philosophy of the state, its ethics – not to mention its aesthetics – are always "yesterday". Language and literature are always "today", and often – particularly in the case where a political system is orthodox – they may even constitute "tomorrow". One of literature's merits is precisely that it helps a person to make the time of his existence more specific, to distinguish himself from the crowd of his predecessors as well as his like numbers, to avoid tautology – that is, the fate otherwise known by the honorific term, "victim of history". What makes art in general, and literature in particular, remarkable, what distinguishes them from life, is precisely that they abhor repetition. In everyday life you can tell the same joke thrice and, thrice getting a laugh, become the life of the party. In art, though, this sort of conduct is called "cliché".

Art is a recoilless weapon, and its development is determined not by the individuality of the artist, but by the dynamics and the logic of the material itself, by the previous fate of the means that each time demand (or suggest) a qualitatively new aesthetic solution. Possessing its own genealogy, dynamics, logic, and future, art is not synonymous with, but at best parallel to history; and the manner by which it exists is by continually creating a new aesthetic reality. That is why it is often found "ahead of progress", ahead of history, whose main instrument is – should we not, once more, improve upon Marx – precisely the cliché.

Nowadays, there exists a rather widely held view, postulating that in his work a writer, in particular a poet, should make use of the language of the street, the language of the crowd. For all its democratic appearance, and its palpable advantages for a writer, this assertion is quite absurd and represents an attempt to subordinate art, in this case, literature, to history. It is only if we have resolved that it is time for Homo sapiens to come to a halt in his development that literature should speak the language of the people. Otherwise, it is the people who should speak the language of literature.

On the whole, every new aesthetic reality makes man's ethical reality more precise. For aesthetics is the mother of ethics; The categories of "good" and "bad" are, first and foremost, aesthetic ones, at least etymologically preceding the categories of "good" and "evil". If in ethics not "all is permitted", it is precisely because not "all is permitted" in aesthetics, because the number of colors in the spectrum is limited. The tender babe who cries and rejects the stranger or who, on the contrary, reaches out to him, does so instinctively, making an aesthetic choice, not a moral one.

Aesthetic choice is a highly individual matter, and aesthetic experience is always a private one. Every new aesthetic reality makes one's experience even more private; and this kind of privacy, assuming at times the guise of literary (or some other) taste, can in itself turn out to be, if not as guarantee, then a form of defense against enslavement. For a man with taste, particularly literary taste, is less susceptible to the refrains and the rhythmical incantations peculiar to any version of political demagogy. The point is not so much that virtue does not constitute a guarantee for producing a masterpiece, as that evil, especially political evil, is always a bad stylist. The more substantial an individual's aesthetic experience is, the sounder his taste, the sharper his moral focus, the freer – though not necessarily the happier – he is.

It is precisely in this applied, rather than Platonic, sense that we should understand Dostoevsky's remark that beauty will save the world, or Matthew Arnold's belief that we shall be saved by poetry. It is probably too late for the world, but for the individual man there always remains a chance. An aesthetic instinct develops in man rather rapidly, for, even without fully realizing who he is and what he actually requires, a person instinctively knows what he doesn't like and what doesn't suit him. In an anthropological respect, let me reiterate, a human being is an aesthetic creature before he is an ethical one. Therefore, it is not that art, particularly literature, is a by-product of our species' development, but just the reverse. If what distinguishes us from other members of the animal kingdom is speech, then literature – and poetry in particular, being the highest form of locution – is, to put it bluntly, the goal of our species.

I am far from suggesting the idea of compulsory training in verse composition; nevertheless, the subdivision of society into intelligentsia and "all the rest" seems to me unacceptable. In moral terms, this situation is comparable to the subdivision of society into the poor and the rich; but if it is still possible to find some purely physical or material grounds for the existence of social inequality, for intellectual inequality these are inconceivable. Equality in this respect, unlike in anything else, has been guaranteed to us by nature. I am speaking not of education, but of the education in speech, the slightest imprecision in which may trigger the intrusion of false choice into one's life. The existence of literature prefigures existence on literature's plane of regard – and not only in the moral sense, but lexically as well. If a piece of music still allows a person the possibility of choosing between the passive role of listener and the active one of performer, a work of literature – of the art which is, to use Montale's phrase, hopelessly semantic – dooms him to the role of performer only.

In this role, it would seem to me, a person should appear more often than in any other. Moreover, it seems to me that, as a result of the population explosion and the attendant, ever-increasing atomization of society (i.e., the ever-increasing isolation of the individual), this role becomes more and more inevitable for a person. I don't suppose that I know more about life than anyone of my age, but it seems to me that, in the capacity of an interlocutor, a book is more reliable than a friend or a beloved. A novel or a poem is not a monologue, but the conversation of a writer with a reader, a conversation, I repeat, that is very private, excluding all others – if you will, mutually misanthropic. And in the moment of this conversation a writer is equal to a reader, as well as the other way around, regardless of whether the writer is a great one or not. This equality is the equality of consciousness. It remains with a person for the rest of his life in the form of memory, foggy or distinct; and, sooner or later, appropriately or not, it conditions a person's conduct. It's precisely this that I have in mind in speaking of the role of the performer, all the more natural for one because a novel or a poem is the product of mutual loneliness – of a writer or a reader.

In the history of our species, in the history of Homo sapiens, the book is anthropological development, similar essentially to the invention of the wheel. Having emerged in order to give us some idea not so much of our origins as of what that sapiens is capable of, a book constitutes a means of transportation through the space of experience, at the speed of a turning page. This movement, like every movement, becomes a flight from the common denominator, from an attempt to elevate this denominator's line, previously never reaching higher than the groin, to our heart, to our consciousness, to our imagination. This flight is the flight in the direction of "uncommon visage", in the direction of the numerator, in the direction of autonomy, in the direction of privacy. Regardless of whose image we are created in, there are already five billion of us, and for a human being there is no other future save that outlined by art. Otherwise, what lies ahead is the past – the political one, first of all, with all its mass police entertainments.

In any event, the condition of society in which art in general, and literature in particular, are the property or prerogative of a minority appears to me unhealthy and dangerous. I am not appealing for the replacement of the state with a library, although this thought has visited me frequently; but there is no doubt in my mind that, had we been choosing our leaders on the basis of their reading experience and not their political programs, there would be much less grief on earth. It seems to me that a potential master of our fates should be asked, first of all, not about how he imagines the course of his foreign policy, but about his attitude toward Stendhal, Dickens, Dostoevsky. If only because the lock and stock of literature is indeed human diversity and perversity, it turns out to be a reliable antidote for any attempt – whether familiar or yet to be invented – toward a total mass solution to the problems of human existence. As a form of moral insurance, at least, literature is much more dependable than a system of beliefs or a philosophical doctrine.

Since there are no laws that can protect us from ourselves, no criminal code is capable of preventing a true crime against literature; though we can condemn the material suppression of literature – the persecution of writers, acts of censorship, the burning of books – we are powerless when it comes to its worst violation: that of not reading

the books. For that crime, a person pays with his whole life; if the offender is a nation, it pays with its history. Living in the country I live in, I would be the first prepared to believe that there is a set dependency between a person's material well-being and his literary ignorance. What keeps me from doing so is the history of that country in which I was born and grew up. For, reduced to a cause-and-effect minimum, to a crude formula, the Russian tragedy is precisely the tragedy of a society in which literature turned out to be the prerogative of the minority: of the celebrated Russian intelligentsia.

I have no wish to enlarge upon the subject, no wish to darken this evening with thoughts of the tens of millions of human lives destroyed by other millions, since what occurred in Russia in the first half of the Twentieth Century occurred before the introduction of automatic weapons – in the name of the triumph of a political doctrine whose unsoundness is already manifested in the fact that it requires human sacrifice for its realization. I'll just say that I believe – not empirically, alas, but only theoretically – that, for someone who has read a lot of Dickens, to shoot his like in the name of some idea is more problematic than for someone who has read no Dickens. And I am speaking precisely about reading Dickens, Sterne, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Balzac, Melville, Proust, Musil, and so forth; that is, about literature, not literacy or education. A literate, educated person, to be sure, is fully capable, after reading this or that political treatise or tract, of killing his like, and even of experiencing, in so doing, a rapture of conviction. Lenin was literate, Stalin was literate, so was Hitler; as for Mao Zedong, he even wrote verse. What all these men had in common, though, was that their hit list was longer than their reading list.

However, before I move on to poetry, I would like to add that it would make sense to regard the Russian experience as a warning, if for no other reason than that the social structure of the West up to now is, on the whole, analogous to what existed in Russia prior to 1917. (This, by the way, is what explains the popularity in the West of the Nineteenth-Century Russian psychological novel, and the relative lack of success of contemporary Russian prose. The social relations that emerged in Russia in the Twentieth Century presumably seem no less exotic to the reader than do the names of the characters, which prevent him from identifying with them.) For example, the number of political parties, on the eve of the October coup in 1917, was no fewer than what we find today in the United States or Britain. In other words, a dispassionate observer might remark that in a certain sense the Nineteenth Century is still going on in the West, while in Russia it came to an end; and if I say it ended in tragedy, this is, in the first place, because of the size of the human toll taken in course of that social – or chronological – change. For in a real tragedy, it is not the hero who perishes; it is the chorus.

III

Although for a man whose mother tongue is Russian to speak about political evil is as natural as digestion, I would here like to change the subject. What's wrong with discourses about the obvious is that they corrupt consciousness with their easiness, with the quickness with which they provide one with moral comfort, with the sensation of being right. Herein lies their temptation, similar in its nature to the temptation of a social reformer who begets this evil. The realization, or rather the comprehension, of this temptation, and rejection of it, are perhaps responsible to a certain extent for the

destinies of many of my contemporaries, responsible for the literature that emerged from under their pens. It, that literature, was neither a flight from history nor a muffling of memory, as it may seem from the outside. “How can one write music after Auschwitz?” inquired Adorno; and one familiar with Russian history can repeat the same question by merely changing the name of the camp – and repeat it perhaps with even greater justification, since the number of people who perished in Stalin’s camps far surpasses the number of German prisoncamp victims. “And how can you eat lunch?” the American poet Mark Strand once retorted. In any case, the generation to which I belong has proven capable of writing that music.

That generation – the generation born precisely at the time when the Auschwitz crematoria were working full blast, when Stalin was at the zenith of his Godlike, absolute power, which seemed sponsored by Mother Nature herself – that generation came into the world, it appears, in order to continue what, theoretically, was supposed to be interrupted in those crematoria and in the anonymous common graves of Stalin’s archipelago. The fact that not everything got interrupted, at least not in Russia, can be credited in no small degree to my generation, and I am no less proud of belonging to it than I am of standing here today. And the fact that I am standing here is a recognition of the services that generation has rendered to culture; recalling a phrase from Mandelstam, I would add, to world culture. Looking back, I can say again that we were beginning in an empty – indeed, a terrifyingly wasted – place, and that, intuitively rather than consciously, we aspired precisely to the recreation of the effect of culture’s continuity, to the reconstruction of its forms and tropes, toward filling its few surviving, and often totally compromised, forms, with our own new, or appearing to us as new, contemporary content.

There existed, presumably, another path: the path of further deformation, the poetics of ruins and debris, of minimalism, of choked breath. If we rejected it, it was not at all because we thought that it was the path of self-dramatization, or because we were extremely animated by the idea of preserving the hereditary nobility of the forms of culture we knew, the forms that were equivalent, in our consciousness, to forms of human dignity. We rejected it because in reality the choice wasn’t ours, but, in fact, culture’s own – and this choice, again, was aesthetic rather than moral.

To be sure, it is natural for a person to perceive himself not as an instrument of culture, but, on the contrary, as its creator and custodian. But if today I assert the opposite, it’s not because toward the close of the Twentieth Century there is a certain charm in paraphrasing Plotinus, Lord Shaftesbury, Schelling, or Novalis, but because, unlike anyone else, a poet always knows that what in the vernacular is called the voice of the Muse is, in reality, the dictate of the language; that it’s not that the language happens to be his instrument, but that he is language’s means toward the continuation of its existence. Language, however, even if one imagines it as a certain animate creature (which would only be just), is not capable of ethical choice.

A person sets out to write a poem for a variety of reasons: to win the heart of his beloved; to express his attitude toward the reality surrounding him, be it a landscape or a state; to capture his state of mind at a given instant; to leave – as he thinks at that moment – a trace on the earth. He resorts to this form – the poem – most likely for

unconsciously mimetic reasons: the black vertical clot of words on the white sheet of paper presumably reminds him of his own situation in the world, of the balance between space and his body. But regardless of the reasons for which he takes up the pen, and regardless of the effect produced by what emerges from beneath that pen on his audience – however great or small it may be – the immediate consequence of this enterprise is the sensation of coming into direct contact with language or, more precisely, the sensation of immediately falling into dependence on it, on everything that has already been uttered, written, and accomplished in it.

This dependence is absolute, despotic; but it unshackles as well. For, while always older than the writer, language still possesses the colossal centrifugal energy imparted to it by its temporal potential – that is, by all time lying ahead. And this potential is determined not so much by the quantitative body of the nation that speaks it (though it is determined by that, too), as by the quality of the poem written in it. It will suffice to recall the authors of Greek or Roman antiquity; it will suffice to recall Dante. And that which is being created today in Russian or English, for example, secures the existence of these languages over the course of the next millennium also. The poet, I wish to repeat, is language's means for existence – or, as my beloved Auden said, he is the one by whom it lives. I who write these lines will cease to be; so will you who read them. But the language in which they are written and in which you read them will remain not merely because language is more lasting than man, but because it is more capable of mutation.

One who writes a poem, however, writes it not because he courts fame with posterity, although often he hopes that a poem will outlive him, at least briefly. One who writes a poem writes it because the language prompts, or simply dictates, the next line. Beginning a poem, the poet as a rule doesn't know the way it's going to come out, and at times he is very surprised by the way it turns out, since often it turns out better than he expected, often his thought carries further than he reckoned. And that is the moment when the future of language invades its present.

There are, as we know, three modes of cognition: analytical, intuitive, and the mode that was known to the Biblical prophets, revelation. What distinguishes poetry from other forms of literature is that it uses all three of them at once (gravitating primarily toward the second and the third). For all three of them are given in the language; and there are times when, by means of a single word, a single rhyme, the writer of a poem manages to find himself where no one has ever been before him, further, perhaps, than he himself would have wished for. The one who writes a poem writes it above all because verse writing is an extraordinary accelerator of conscience, of thinking, of comprehending the universe. Having experienced this acceleration once, one is no longer capable of abandoning the chance to repeat this experience; one falls into dependency on this process, the way others fall into dependency on drugs or on alcohol. One who finds himself in this sort of dependency on language is, I guess, what they call a poet.

[Translated from the Russian by Barry Rubin.]

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Banquet Speech

Joseph Brodsky's speech at the Nobel Banquet, December 10, 1987

Your Majesties, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I was born and grew up on the other shore of the Baltic, practically on its opposite grey rustling page. Sometimes on clear days, especially in autumn, standing on a beach somewhere in Kellomaki, a friend would poke his finger north-west across the sheet of water and say: See that blue strip of land? It's Sweden.

He would be joking, of course: because the angle was wrong, because according to the law of optics, a human eye can travel only for something like twenty miles in open space. The space, however, wasn't open.

Nonetheless, it pleases me to think, ladies and gentlemen, that we used to inhale the same air, eat the same fish, get soaked by the same – at times – radioactive rain, swim in the same sea, get bored by the same kind of conifers.

Depending on the wind, the clouds I saw from my window were already seen by you, or vice-versa. It pleases me to think that we have had something in common before we ended up in this room.

And as far as this room is concerned, I think it was empty just a couple of hours ago, and it will be empty again a couple of hours hence. Our presence in it, mine especially, is quite incidental from its walls' point of view. On the whole, from space's point of view, anyone's presence is incidental in it, unless one possesses a permanent – and usually inanimate – characteristic of landscape – of a moraine, say, of a hilltop, of a river bend. And it is the appearance of something or somebody unpredictable within a space well used to its contents that creates the sense of occasion.

So being grateful to you for your decision to award me the Nobel Prize for literature, I am essentially grateful for your imparting to my work an aspect of permanence, of a glacier's debris, let's say, in the vast landscape of literature.

I am fully aware of the danger hidden in this simile: coldness, uselessness, eventual or fast erosion. Yet if it contains a single vein of animated ore – as I, in my vanity, believe it does – then this simile is perhaps prudent.

As long as I am on the subject of prudence, I should like to add that through recorded history, the audience for poetry seldom amounted to more than 1 % of the entire population. That's why poets of antiquity or of the Renaissance gravitated to courts,

the seats of power; that's why nowadays they flock to universities, the seats of knowledge. Your academy seems to be a cross between the two; and if in the future – in that time free of ourselves – that 1 % ratio will be sustained, it will be, not to a small degree, due to your efforts. In case this strikes you as a dim vision of the future, I hope that the thought about the population explosion may lift your spirits somewhat. Even a quarter of that 1 % will make a lot of readers, even today.

So my gratitude to you, ladies and gentlemen, is not entirely egoistical. I am grateful to you for those whom your decisions make and will make read poetry, today and tomorrow. I am not so sure that man will prevail, as the great man and my fellow American once said standing, I believe, in this very room; but I am quite positive that a man who reads poetry is harder to prevail upon than upon one who doesn't.

Of course, it's one hell of a way to get from Petersburg to Stockholm; but then for a man of my occupation the notion of a straight line being the shortest distance between two points has lost its attraction long time ago. So, it pleases me to find out that geography in its own turn is also capable of poetic justice.

Thank you!

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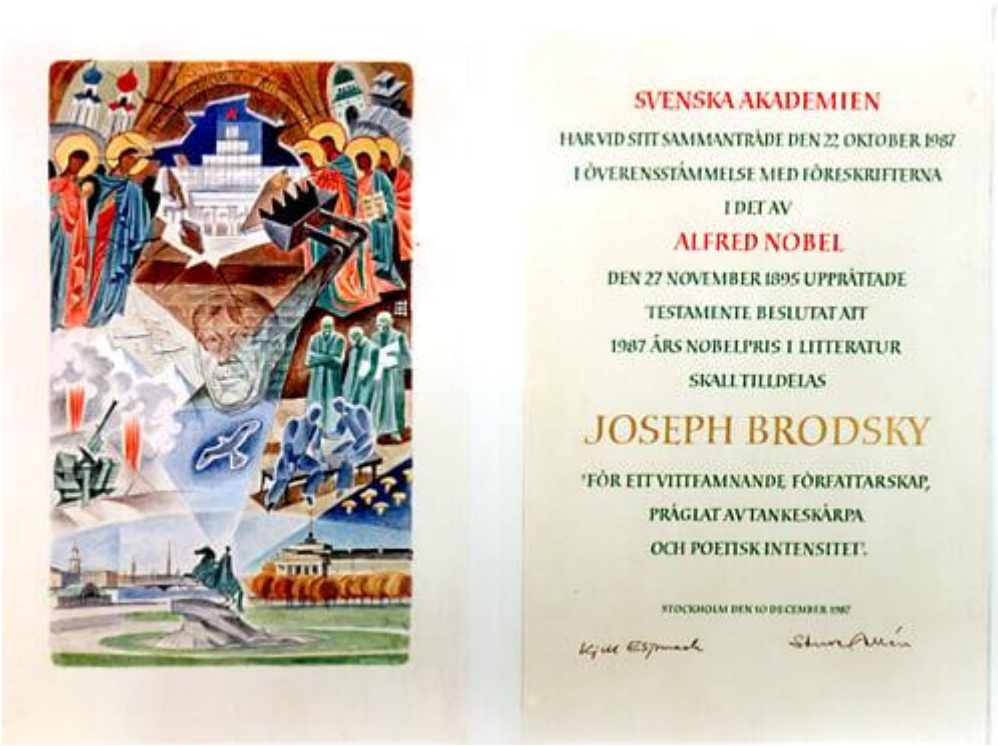
Nobel Diploma



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Poetry

Seven Strophes

I was but what you'd brush
with your palm, what your leaning
brow would hunch to in evening's
raven-black hush.

I was but what your gaze
in that dark could distinguish:
a dim shape to begin with,
later – features, a face.

It was you, on my right,
on my left, with your heated
sighs, who molded my helix,
whispering at my side.

It was you by that black
window's trembling tulle pattern
who laid in my raw cavern
a voice calling you back.

I was practically blind.
You, appearing, then hiding,
gave me my sight and heightened
it. Thus some leave behind

a trace. Thus they make worlds.
Thus, having done so, at random
wastefully they abandon
their work to its whirls.

Thus, prey to speeds
of light, heat, cold, or darkness,

a sphere in space without markers
spins and spins.

(☺)$$$

house here, you are bound to get lost in these long, coiling lanes and passageways that beguile you to see them through, to follow them to their elusive end, which usually hits water, so that you can't even call it a cul-de-sac. On the map this city looks like two grilled fish sharing a plate, or perhaps like two nearly overlapping lobster claws (Pasternak compared it to a swollen croissant); but it has no north, south, east, or west; the only direction it has is sideways. It surrounds you like frozen seaweed, and the more you dart and dash about trying to get your bearings, the more you get lost. The yellow arrow signs at intersections are not much help either, for they, too, curve. In fact, they don't so much help you as kelp you. And in the fluently flapping hand of the native whom you stop to ask for directions, the eye, oblivious to his sputtering *A destra, a sinistra, dritto, dritto*, readily discerns a fish.

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Iosif Brodskiy photographed by his father, Alexandr Brodskiy, on the balcony of their apartment in Leningrad in 1958.

When Joseph Brodsky was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1987, times were changing. The Soviet Union was opening up, but the authorities were still not able to cope with the fact that a Russian writer had got the prize, and it was announced with great delay.

Iosif Brodskiy was born in Leningrad in 1940 and died in New York in 1996 as Joseph Brodsky. Between the two spellings of his name lies one of the more dramatic human and poetic destinies in 20th century Russia – a country rich in drama.

Iosif Brodskiy grew up in the Soviet Union, first during the Stalinist era, then under the milder political climate of Khrushchev and Brezhnev. He started to write poetry at the end of the 1950s, but like everybody else who refused to accept the Soviet aesthetic norms he encountered great difficulties and could only publish a few poems.

Brodskiy revolutionised Russian poetry by introducing themes that were taboo in the Soviet Union, first of all metaphysical and Biblical ones. And he did it in a verse that was both innovative and exceptionally varied. Influenced by his Russian 18th century precursors (first of all Derzhavin), as well as by Polish poets (Galczynski, Norwid) and the English Metaphysicals (Donne, Herbert, Marvell), Brodskiy enriched Russian literature with a new ironic sensibility. The conspicuous use of literary reminiscences and allusions could perhaps be seen as a result of his growing up in almost total cultural isolation, where every alternative voice was eagerly absorbed.

In the Soviet Union such things did not go unpunished. The young poet was regarded as a rebel and a parasite: he was arrested and, after a parody of a trial, in 1964 exiled to northern Russia to think better of it. This he did, but not in the way the authorities

had wished. During his exile he developed his poetic technique and ripened as a poet. And thanks to protests from Soviet and Western intellectuals, he was set free in 1965, before the end of his term. He returned to his hometown, Leningrad, where he stayed until he was sent into foreign exile in 1972 – this time without trial and for good. He settled in the USA, where he became *Joseph Brodsky,* an American citizen, and where he lived until his death twenty-four years later.

Brodskiy during his exile in
Northern Russia.

In the USA, Brodsky continued to write poetry in Russian, and also translated many of his poems into English. If he never reached the same poetic peaks in English as in Russian, he developed instead into a brilliant essayist in English. As a writer Brodsky thus had two identities, and it was in his capacity as one of the greatest Russian poets of the 20th century and a major essayist in the English language that he was acclaimed by the Swedish Academy in 1987 for his "all-embracing authorship, imbued with clarity of thought and poetic intensity".

Time Is Greater than Space

His first collection of essays, *Less Than One,* was published in 1986. Some of the best essays were devoted to his great predecessors in Russian poetry – Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova, and Marina Tsvetayeva. In an essay on Tsvetayeva, Brodsky formulates his view of the poet as a "combination of an instrument and a human being in one person, with the former gradually taking over the latter".

**Brodskiy's study photographed on June 4, 1972,
the same day he was exiled from the Soviet Union.**

The poet, transformed gradually into an instrument for his poetic gift, has no choice – and the recognition of this exclusiveness determines his path. By constantly listening to his own voice, constantly developing his language, constantly taking the next stylistic step, he becomes more and more isolated.

Brodsky's words about Tsvetayeva are a self-characterisation. Brodsky the poet is led farther and farther away from the literary mainstream by language itself. And Brodsky the man, grown up in a society with whose values he cannot reconcile himself and which refuses to accept him, is, like Tsvetayeva and Mandelstam, forced into a growing social alienation. The exile to northern Russia and his expatriation eight years later are but outer confirmations of an inner process that in other countries would have taken less dramatic turns.

In the poem "Lullaby of Cape Cod" (1975), Brodsky describes his "move" to the USA as a "change of Empire". However shattering this experience may be, it changes nothing in essence. Empires have always existed and resemble one another, if not in detail (one empire can, of course, be more repugnant than the other), then at least in structure – and as regards man's place in this structure. Although Brodsky was heavily marked by his Soviet experience, he had no illusions about other political systems being able to provide a perfect alternative. The big enemy is not space but time.

It is Brodsky's approach to time that determines his worldview. "What interests me and always has interested me most is time and its effect on man, how it changes him, grinds him… On the other hand, this is just a metaphor for what time does to space and the world." Time reigns supreme – all that is not time is subjected to the power of time, "the ruler", "the owner". Time is the enemy of man and everything man has created and holds dear: "Ruins are the triumph of oxygen and time."

Time clings to man, who grows older, dies and turns into "dust" – "time's flesh", as Brodsky calls it. Key words in his poetry are "splinter", "shard", "fragment". One of his books of poetry is called *A Part of Speech.* Man – in particular, a poet – is a part of a language that is older than he and will live on after time has settled the account with language's servant.
Man is attacked both by the past and the future. What we experience as unpleasant and negative in life is, as a matter of fact, a cry from the future, which is trying to break ground in the present. The only thing that prevents the future and the past from merging is the short period constituted by the present, symbolised by man and his body in "Ecloque IV: Winter" (1977):

… What sets them apart is only
a warm body. Mule-like, stubborn creature,
it stands firmly between them, rather
like a border guard: stiffened, sternly
preventing the wandering of the future

into the past. …
On the personal level, Brodsky views life as a "one way street". A return to what has passed – an earlier life, a woman – is impossible. In "December in Florence" (1976), about Dante and his hometown, about the poet and exile, Florence is double-exposed with another city – Leningrad. There are, writes Brodsky,

… cities one won't see again. The sun
throws its gold at their frozen windows. But all the same
there is no entry, no proper sum.
There are always six bridges spanning the sluggish river.
There are places where lips touched lips for the first time ever,
or pen pressed paper with real fervor.
There are arcades, colonnades, iron idols that blur your lens.
There the streetcar's multitudes, jostling, dense,
speak in the tongue of a man who's departed thence.

In spite of all Communism, "Leningrad", that is, St. Petersburg, remains "the most beautiful city in the world". The return is not impossible primarily because of an unpalatable political system – which a superficial reading might suggest – but by deeper, psychological factors: "A man moves only in one direction. And only *from.* From a place, from a thought that has entered his mind, from himself… that is, constantly away from what has been experienced…"

**Bridges in St. Petersburg (clockwise):
Troitsky Bridge, Prachechny Bridge,
Bankovsky Bridge, Kamenny Bridge.**

The individual's journey in time and space is matched by a similar development toward non-existence on the historic plane. Not so much because of the threat of atomic bombs or other acts of war but because societies and civilisations are subject to the same "time war" as the individual. To Brodsky, the big threat comes from the demographic changes leading to the peril of Western, that is, individual-based,

civilisation. A recurring theme is the diminishing role of the Christian world – to Brodsky, as to Osip Mandelstam, "Christianity" is first and foremost a question of civilisation – in favour of the "anti-individualistic pathos of an overpopulated world". Thus the individual's future merges with the world's: the death of the individual with that of individualism.

Language Is Greater than Time

Against all-devouring Time, which leads to the absence of both the individual and the world, Brodsky mobilises the word. Few modern poets have stressed with such intensity the word's ability to withstand the passing of time. This conviction recurs frequently in Brodsky's poems, often in the last lines:

I don't know anymore what earth will nurse my carcass.
Scratch on, my pen: let's mark the white the way it marks us.
("The Fifth Anniversary", 1977)

That's the birth of an eclogue. Instead of the shepherd's signal,
A lamp's flaring up. Cyrillic, while running witless
on the pad as though to escape the captor,
knows more of the future than the famous sibyl:
of how to darken against the whiteness,
as long as the whiteness lasts. And after.
("Eclogue IV: Winter")

Brodsky's belief in the power of the word must be seen against his view of time and space. Literature is superior to society – and to the writer himself. The idea that it is not the language but the poet who is the instrument is, as we have seen, at the core of Brodsky's poetics. Language is older than society and, naturally, older than the poet, and it is language that keeps nations together when "the centre cannot hold" (with Yeats's words).

Joseph Brodsky (left) and fellow Nobel Prize Laureate Derek Walcott in the park of Alfred Nobel's home at Björkborn, Sweden, 1993.

Men die, writers do not. A poet who formulated the same thought with similar pregnancy was W.H. Auden in his "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" (1939). It was the third and last part of this triptych that made such an indelible impression on Brodsky (he describes it in the essay "Less Than One") when he first read the poem during his exile in northern Russia:

Time that is intolerant
Of the brave and innocent,
And indifferent in a week
To a beautiful physique,

Worships language and forgives
Everyone by whom it lives …

Language, in other words, is superior not only to society and the poet but to time itself. Time "worships language" and is thus "lesser" than it. There is a strain of a romantic fatalism in this assertion, but in Russia, a country where people, in Pushkin's words, are always "mute", the writer has always occupied a unique position. This emphasis on the dominance of language is thus not an expression of aestheticism; in a society where language is nationalised, where language is political even when it does not speak of politics, the word possesses an enormous explosive force.

Poetry Is Greater than Prose

In Brodsky's aesthetical hierarchy, poetry occupies the first place. "The concept of equality is extrinsic to the nature of art, and the thinking of any man of letters is hierarchical. Within this hierarchy, poetry occupies a higher position than prose…" This does not mean that poetry is "better" than prose but is a logical conclusion of Brodsky's view of the hierarchy Language-Time-Space. Time is greater than space, but language is greater than time. To write is essentially to try to "regain" or "hold back" time, and for this purpose the poet has at his disposal means that the prose-writer lacks: meter and caesuras, syntactic pauses, stressed and unstressed syllables. An important means of restructuring and holding back time is rhyme, which refers back but also creates expectation, that is, future. "Song is, after all, restructured time", says Brodsky (in his essay on Osip Mandelstam), or simply, speaking of Auden, "a repository of time". And if language lives by the poet, does then not "time" live by the poet, in his poems?

In order best to move with time, the poem should try to imitate time's monotone, try to make it resemble the sound produced by a pendulum. Brodsky's own voice is described as almost inaudible:

I am speaking to you, and it's not my fault
if you don't hear. The sum of days, by slugging
on, blisters eyeballs; the same goes for vocal cords.
My voice may be muffled but, I should hope, not nagging.

All the better to hear the crowing of a cockerel, the tick-tocks
in the heart of a record, its needle's patter;
all the better for you not to notice when my talk stops,
as Little Red Riding Hood didn't mutter to her gray partner.
("Afterword", 1986)

The poet's voice, "more muffled than the bird's, but more sonorous than the pike's", as it is characterised in the poem "Comments from a Fern" (1989), is so subdued that it almost erases the difference between sound and silence, and so close to time's rhythm one can get – a rhythm that the poet can approximate with the help of meter. When Brodsky stresses the importance of classical forms, he is not just being conservative; he does it with a belief in their double function as a structuring element and upholder of civilisation; the assertion of the absolute value of these stylistic means are thus not primarily a question of form but an important part of what could be called Brodsky's philosophy of culture.

Linear Thinking

Joseph Brodsky wrote poetry for the better part of his life, and the history of his publications is a reflection of the political system he grew up in. His first books were selections from his poetry published by friends and admirers in the West and were forbidden reading in his home country. In the Soviet Union, his first book was published only after the Nobel Prize. A full-scale publication of his works, including Russian translations of his essays, was made possible only after the fall of the Communist dictatorship in 1991.

**Brodsky with his cat Mississippi,
New York, November 1987.**

One consequence of Brodsky's idea that a person moves only in one direction – *from* – was that he never went back to his homeland. His thinking – and acting – was linear. From the age of thirty-two he was a "nomad" – a Virgilian hero, doomed never to return home.

When asked why he did not want to go back, Brodsky answered that he didn't want to visit his home country as a tourist. Or that he didn't want to go on an invitation from official institutions. His final argument was: "The best part of me is already there: my poetry."

* **Bengt Jangfeldt** has been specializing in Russian literature for 30 years. His doctoral thesis (1976) treated the relationship between the Soviet State and the literary avant-garde during the years of the revolution, 1917-1921. This work was later supplemented by a series of archival editions.

Professor Jangfeldt has collected and published the correspondence between Vladimir Mayakovsky and Lili Brik (in Russian in 1982 and 1991, in English in 1986: "Love is the Heart of Everything") as well as the literary legacy of the great Russian linguist, Roman Jakobson (Russian edition 1992, English edition 1997: "My Futurist Years"). During the last ten years he has been focusing on the historical ties between Sweden and the St. Petersburg region. This work has resulted in several books, including *Svenska vägar till S:t Petersburg* which in 1998 was awarded the August Prize (the Swedish equivalent of the Booker Prize). His last books include an authorised biography of the Swedish author and doctor Axel Munthe (*En osalig ande*, 2003).

Bengt Jangfeldt has translated many of Joseph Brodsky's works into Swedish, the poetry from Russian and the prose from English. In 1988, he was awarded the Letterstedt Prize for Translation by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences for rendering into Swedish Brodsky's book of essays, "Less Than One".

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Press Release

Swedish Academy
The Permanent Secretary
Press release
October 1987

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1987

Joseph Brodsky

This year's Nobel Prize winner in Literature was born in Leningrad and lives in New York. Aged only 47 he is one of the youngest ever to have been awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature. A sign of the luminous intensity of his writing is that he has already been translated into more than a dozen languages.

Brodsky is chiefly a poet and essayist. He belongs to the classical Russian tradition with predecessors such as Pushkin and the Nobel Prizewinner Pasternak. At the same time he is a masterly renewer of poetical language and poetical forms of expression, inspired by Osip Mandelstam and Anna Achmatova among others.

Another of Brodsky's sources of inspiration is English poetry from the metaphysicist John Donne to W.H. Auden, he who wanted to be a lesser, atlantic Goethe. That language is the stuff that empires are made of is a vital thought with Brodsky as well.

For Brodsky, poetry is a divine gift. The religious dimension that one meets in his work is of a nature that adheres to no creed. Metaphysical and ethical questions are paramount.

The east-west background – literary, geographical, linguistic – has greatly influenced Brodsky's writing. It has given it an unusual wealth of themes and manifold perspectives. Together with the writer's profound insight into the literature of earlier epochs it has also conjured up a grand historical vision.

The change of environment and language after Brodsky had left the Soviet in 1972 naturally involved a severe nervous strain for the poet. In the poem 1972 (in the collection *A Part of Speech* 1980) he depicts how he will gradually lose hair, teeth, consonants, verbs, and endings. Nevertheless he is now engaged on a prolific poetical work in Russian. Parallel with that he takes an active part in the translation of his works into English and sometimes writes directly in this language to great effect *History of the Twentieth Century* (1986)is a series of poems in a tone of raillery and parody, written with a quite amazing mastery of the English idiom.
All literature really is about what time does to people, Brodsky has said, thus indicating a main theme in his writing. Parting, becoming deformed, growing old, dying are the work of time. Poetry helps us, gives us basically the only possibility of withstanding the pressure of existence.

Poetry's role in the world is another central theme. It may apply to totalitarian societies, in which the poet can become the mouthpiece for those who apparently are silent, or to open societies in which his voice

threatens to be drowned in the flood of information. In the brilliant collection of essays *Less Than One* (1980) Brodsky feels his way in towards the core of the problem from various directions. The poet is a word craftsman, a master of language. Poetry is the highest form of language. Brodsky sees it also as the highest form of life. The poet becomes an instrument with a questioning sound.

The Swedish Academy's citation aims at the great breadth In time and space which characterizes Joseph Brodsky's writing and at both the intellectual and sensitive side of this rich and intensely vital work.

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MacFadyen, David, *Joseph Brodsky and the Baroque.* – Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 1998

Rigsbee, David, *Styles of ruin : Joseph Brodsky and the postmodernist elegy.* – Westport, Conn. : Greenwood, 1999

Joseph Brodsky : the art of a poem / edited by Lev Loseff and Valentina Polukhina. – Basingstoke : Macmillan, 1999

MacFadyen, David, *Joseph Brodsky and the Soviet muse* . – Montréal : McGill-Queen, 2000

Joseph Brodsky : *conversations* / edited by Cynthia L. Haven. – Jackson : University Press of Mississippi, 2003

(☺)(☺)**********(☺)(☺)

Awards and Honors

- 1978 – Honorary degree of Doctor of Letters, Yale University
- 1979 – Fellowship of American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters
- 1981 – John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation award
- 1986 – Honorary doctorate of literature from Oxford University
- The International Center in New York's Award of Excellence
- 1986 – National Book Critics Award for Criticism, for *Less Than One* (essay collection)
- 1987 – Nobel Prize
- 1989 – Honorary doctorate from the University of Essex
- 1989 – Honorary degree from Dartmouth College

- 1991 – honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Humanities at Uppsala University, Sweden
- 1991 – United States Poet Laureate
- 1991 – Struga Poetry Evenings Golden Wreath Award
- 1993 – Honorary degree from the University of Silesia in Poland
- Honorary member of the International Academy of Science, Munich

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radio station WPFW-FM. It was first published in the *American Poetry Review* in 1992. It has never been seen online.

A native of Leningrad, now St. Petersburg, Joseph Brodsky's poetry has been published in twelve languages. He lived in the U.S. since 1972 when he was exiled from the Soviet Union. He was the recipient of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Award. His essay collection, *Less Than One*, was awarded the 1986 National Book Award for criticism. He won the 1987 Nobel Prize for Literature.

Grace Cavalieri: Your initial address at the Library of Congress (October, 1991) was also published in The New Republic*. Here you present yourself as an activist for poetry, an enthusiast: "The poetry consultant as the poetry activist." Is that how you wanted to be received?*

Joseph Brodsky: It's fine if people feel that way but the main point is simply I honestly regard that this job, being paid by the Library of Congress in Washington, makes me the property of the public for this year. It is in the spirit of the public servant. My concern is the public's access to poetry which I find very limited, idiotically so, and I would like to change it if I can.

Cavalieri: Do you think you can?

Brodsky: It takes more than a speech preaching to the converts here at the Library. It takes publishers, entrepreneurs, to throw money into the idea.

Cavalieri: In addition to wanting more poetry published and distributed you bring a new view to American poetry. Would you tell us some of your feelings about this country's poetry?

Brodsky: Basically, I think it's remarkable poetry, a tremendous poetry this nation has and doesn't touch. To my ear and my eye it's a nonstop sermon of human autonomy, of individualism, self-reliance. It's a poetry hard to escape. It has its own faults and vices but it doesn't suffer malaise typical of the poetry of the continent—Europe—self aggrandizement on the part of the poem, where the poet regards himself as a public figure … all those Promethean affinities and "grandstanding." Those things are alien to the generous spirit of American poetry, at least for the last century. The distinction of an American poet from his European counterpart, in the final analysis, is a poetry of responsibility … a responsibility for his fellow human beings. This is a narrowing of the ethical application of poetry. What a European does—French, German, Italian, Russian—is move his blamethirsty finger. It oscillates 360 degrees all the time, trying to indicate who is at fault, trying to explain his and society's ills. An American, if his finger points at anything, it's most likely himself or the existential order of things.

Cavalieri: And you call this a sermon of resilience?

Brodsky: Yes if you like.

Cavalieri: You were exiled from Russia in 1972, having previously been sentenced to five years hard labor at an Arctic labor camp. Did the efforts of Russian intellectuals and writers win your release?

Brodsky: Not only those. People abroad too. One person who interceded in my behalf was the father of the H-bomb, **Edward Teller**.

Cavalieri: And you then accepted the invitation to come to this country?

Brodsky: I was put on a plane going only in one direction with no return ticket and a friend of mine from the University of Michigan, now dead, **Carl Proffer**, a great man, a professor of Slavic languages, met me and asked how I would like to come to the University of Michigan as poet in residence.

Cavalieri: That young man, all those years ago…

Brodsky: Almost twenty.

Cavalieri: He was such a brave stubborn independent man. Do you feel that he's still with you? Do you know that man now?

Brodsky: He is still within me. Those years in Michigan are the only childhood I ever had.

Cavalieri: In reading the transcripts of your trial I was struck with how unafraid you sounded. How did you feel?

Brodsky: I don't really remember. I don't think I was afraid. No. I knew who runs the show. I knew I was on the receiving end so it didn't really matter; I knew what it would boil down to.

*Cavalieri: I was wondering when watching the **Clarence Thomas** hearings recently how you might feel while watching them…the way they were doing business…having been on the hot seat once yourself, and watching something so vastly American and unwieldy as those hearings. In a way it could only happen in America.*

Brodsky: I felt very upset with a bad taste in my mouth. It wasn't really a court case. I felt it was utterly ridiculous and people often find themselves in the predicament choosing between two things where neither one is good.

Cavalieri: I would have liked to see a poet as questioner. We would have gotten a different approach.

Brodsky: I wouldn't question Judge Thomas. I know enough about the transaction between the opposite sexes not to question him on that score.

Cavalieri: Do you write poetry primarily in English now?

Brodsky: Poetry I write primarily in Russian. Essays, and lectures, blurbs, reference letters, reviews, I write in English.

Cavalieri: How much are we missing? We see and hear English translations of your poems and some are called brilliant in any language.

Brodsky: You can't say you are missing much. You can't say you are missing the prosody of another language. You can't miss the acoustics of another language. The original is rooted in the euphony of the Russian language. That of course you can't have and you're not missing it. You can't miss something that you don't know.

Cavalieri: We can get a good lyrical poem anyway that is matchless.

Brodsky: That's what it is if it works in English. You have to be a judge of solely how it is in English.

Cavalieri: We shouldn't feel we're getting only ninety percent of something which is absolute.

Brodsky: You get a poem in English, good or bad. You can't fantasize about what it'd be like in the original.

Cavalieri: I was watching you recite recently without looking at the page. Can you recite every one of your poems in Russian?

Brodsky: By heart? I don't think so. Not any longer. Until I was forty I knew them all.

Cavalieri: Do the translations usually please you?

Brodsky: It's a very peculiar sensation when you receive the translation of your own poem. On one hand you're terribly pleased that something you've done will interest the English. The initial sentiment is the pleasure. As you start to read it turns very quickly into horror and it's a tremendously interesting mixture of those two sentiments. There is no name for that in Russian or in English. It's a highly schizophrenic sensation.

Cavalieri: There isn't a word for joy and terror.

Brodsky: Jerror.

Cavalieri: Your devotion to the craft as well as to the spirit of poetry is well known. You're famous for your reverence to the forms, the metrics, the structure. Since you are a man who champions individualism, I have to ask whether you believe there could be some poet's experience which would not fall within a formalistic structure?

Brodsky: Easily so. I'm not suggesting a strait jacket. I'm just thinking that when the poet resorts to a certain medium, whether it is metric verse or free verse, he should

be at least aware of those differences. Poetry is of a very rich past. There's a great deal of family history to it. For instance when one resorts to free verse, one has to remember that everything prefaced with the epithet "free" means "free from what." Freedom is not an autonomous condition. It is a determined condition. In physics it's determined by the statics. In politics it's conditioned by slavery, and what kind of freedom can you talk of in transcendental terms. Free means not free but liberated, "free from"—free from strict meters, so essentially it's a reaction to strict meters. Free verse. An individual who just resorts to it has to, in a miniature manner, go through the history of verse in English before liberating himself from it. Other than this you start with a borrowed medium—how should I say this—a medium that is more not yours than are strict meters.

Cavalieri: Do you teach creative writing?

Brodsky: No, I don't. I teach creative reading. My course at Mt. Holyoke is described as teaching "the subject matter and strategy in lyric poetry"—What's the poet after; How's he doing it; What's he up to?

Cavalieri: Reviewers attribute all sorts of things to you regarding craft…moral, social forces embodied in craft.

Brodsky: All those things are there.

Cavalieri: I am also very interested in your plays and I wonder if you think they're getting enough notice.

Brodsky: I don't think they are, but I never expected them to get much.

Cavalieri: "Marbles" was produced just once?

Brodsky: Once or twice here, but all over the place in Europe.

*Cavalieri: This reminds me of **Howard Nemerov**. His dramatic literature is among the best written in English, and it scarcely could get produced. When I read "Marbles" I thought I saw another side to your writing.*

Brodsky: It's actually the same.

Cavalieri: The themes are but you get a little wilder on the stage.

Brodsky: It's very natural for someone who writes poetry to write plays. A poem, and especially the poem saddled with all those formal hurdles of rhyme and meter, is essentially a form of dialogue. Every monologue is a form of a dialogue because of the voices in it. What is "To be or not to be" but a dialogue. It's a question and answer. It's dialectical form, and, small wonder that a poet one day gets to write plays.

Cavalieri: Do you like the theater?

Brodsky: To read but not to go to. Often it's been an embarrassment.

Cavalieri: You start with an instinctive knowledge of the elements of theater—the containment of the prisoners within a cell ("Marbles").

Brodsky: The poet in a poem is a stage designer, a director, the characters, the body instructor, etcetera. Take for instance "Home Burial" by **Robert Frost**. It's a perfect little drama. It's also a ballet piece. Even **Alfred Hitchcock** would like it. There's a banister which plays a substantial role.

Cavalieri: And we should mention the compression of action of stage. The poem itself is compression of space. The word "Marbles" brings forth many meanings—the colloquialism, the game, the actual statues on stage, all those. What was the word in Russian which carried all those nuances?

Brodsky: The same. Marbles. But it carries less nuance in Russian than in English.

Cavalieri: You have in your poetry humor, irony, wryness. But in theater you do some high jinks. I think it's much more spirited and you have a chance to break free a little bit more.

Brodsky: Possibly but I don't think I'm freer in prose than in a poem.

Cavalieri: When you heard that you won the Nobel Prize for Literature that must have been quite a moment for you.

Brodsky: It was funny. I was in the company of **John Le Carré** in a restaurant in London and a friend ran in with the news.

Cavalieri: Your acceptance speech is one of the finest essays you have ever written. I thought it must have been a pleasure to be able to write that—to be given the opportunity—the chance to say everything that you stand for. It might even have been easy for you to write, because you had this one opportunity to say everything you believe and to tell who you are. What do you think is the one thing which resonates from that speech?

Brodsky: I don't really know what does. I would advise to a writer to prepare it beforehand for when it happens, when you are awarded the Nobel Prize, you have only a month to write it and all of a sudden you don't know what to say and you're under the gun. I remember I was rushing to write it and it was darn difficult. I was never more nervous than then.

Cavalieri: So you think all writers should write an acceptance speech for the Nobel prize just to have on hand?

Brodsky: Yes, just in case.

Cavalieri: Well it isn't a bad idea to have a credo.

Brodsky: To begin with.

Cavalieri: Even if no one wants it.

Brodsky: You can use it for yourself.

Cavalieri: Are you pleased with the acceptance speech?

Brodsky: Yes I'm pleased with several points.

Cavalieri: You delivered it in Russian.

Brodsky: At the last moment. As I entered the room I made up my mind. I had two versions of it, the Russian and the English.

Cavalieri: And at the last moment you felt more comfortable with the Russian. It was then published in The New Republic*. We should reprint that one.*

Brodsky: That would be nice because it's a good speech.

Cavalieri: What it says is that poetry is the only thing that counts.

Brodsky: Perhaps the most valuable remark made there is that there are two or three modes of cognition available to our species: analysis, intuition, and the one which was available to the biblical prophets—revelation. The virtue of poetry is that in the process of composition, you combine all three, if you're lucky. At least you combine two: analysis and intuition—a synthesis. The net result may be revelatory. If you take a rough look at the globe and who inhabits it. . . in the West we have the emphasis on the Russian now, on "reason." A premium is being put on it. And the East has reflexiveness and intuition. A poet, by default, is the healthiest possible specimen—a fusion of those two.

Cavalieri: Do you know ***Václav Havel****?*

Brodsky: No, I've seen him twice.

Cavalieri: Did you speak?

Brodsky: No. It took three quarters of a century for the Czech Declaration of Independence to wind up in the right hands.

Cavalieri: Have you received an invitation to return to your native land?

Brodsky: No I have not. Who cares?

Cavalieri: You haven't been back since '72. Last summer I concentrated on Russian history. But somewhere I stopped taking notes on current affairs simply from fatigue. You must feel that way.

Brodsky: For the first time I'm somewhat proud for the country I was born in. It finds itself in a tremendous predicament. Nobody knows what to do. Nobody knows how to live. Nobody knows what steps to take and, yet, for the first time in its long history, it doesn't act radically facing this confusion. In a sense that confusion reflects the human predicament par excellence, simply because nobody knows how to live. All forms of social and individual organization, like the political system, are simply ways to shield oneself and the nation from that confusion. And for the moment they don't shield themselves . . . their faces, **Thomas Hardy** once said the recipe for good poetry, I paraphrase badly here, "One should exact the full look at the worst" and that's what takes place right now in Russia so maybe the results will be attractive. I'm not terribly hopeful here because there are 300 million people. No matter what you do, there are no happy solutions for that amount of people. One should be cognizant of that. if I were at the helm, near the radio, near the mic, that's what I'd tell people. It's not going to be glorious for everybody. Freedom is no picnic. It's a great deal of responsibility, a great deal of choices and a human being is bound to make some wrong choices sooner or later. So it's going to be quite difficult for quite a number of people. The entire nation, at this point, needs something like vocational training because lots of people have been put in jobs wrong for them. They relied on the state—on the paternalistic structure. There is terrific inertia from always relying on somebody and not taking individual responsibility.

Cavalieri: How will the Russian poet reflect this?

Brodsky: I don't think we can say. Art depends on history or social reality. It's a Marxist idea, or Aristotelian I think, that Art reflects life. Art has its own dynamics…its own history…its own velocity…its own incomprehensible target. In a way it's like a runaway train upon which society boards or doesn't board. And when it boards, it doesn't know which direction it'll go. The train started a long time before. Literature (poetry) is older than any existing political system, any system of the government or any social organization. A song was there before any story. And so basically it evolves, develops, and continues along its own lines sometimes overlapping with the history of the state or the society or the reality of society—sometimes not. One shouldn't subordinate Art to life. Art is different from life in that it doesn't resort to repetition and to the clichés, whereas life always resorts to clichés in spite of itself because it always has to start from scratch.

Cavalieri: One remark you've made about the Augustan era, the Roman time on earth, is that the only record we have of human sensibilities is from the poets.

Brodsky: Yes I think the poets gave us quite a lot more than anything else, any other record.

Cavalieri: What do you think the future will know about us from what we say?

Brodsky: It will know pretty little about ourselves. It will judge us by what literature we leave.

Cavalieri: By what literature remains.

Brodsky: A millennium hence…I don't know if people will still exist but if they're interested in the twentieth century they'll read the books written in the twentieth century.

Cavalieri: You've taught at the University of Michigan. You've been a Visiting Professor at Queens College, Smith College, Columbia University, and Cambridge. You've been awarded honorary Doctorate degrees from Williams College and Yale University.

Brodsky: And some other places … The University of Rochester, also from Oxford, England among others. We should just mention those—not that I'm shaking my medals.

Cavalieri: At each time do you make a speech?

Brodsky: Regretfully, yes.

Cavalieri: Should they be collected in a book?

Brodsky: Well, no.

Cavalieri: Does Joseph Brodsky have any poetry that is not published?

Brodsky: Plenty.

Cavalieri: Is there anyone who'd reject a poem?

Brodsky: Yes, that's healthy. Nothing changes that way.

Cavalieri: How do you write your poems? Do your poems gather themselves? Do you walk along collecting images until the time to release?

Brodsky: I don't deliberately or knowingly collect things. The poem always starts with the first line, or a line anyway, and from that you go. It's something like a hum to which you try to fit the line and then it proceeds that way.

Cavalieri: Mystics say the very beginning of the human species came through sound, the vibration of sound.

Brodsky: That's nice of them.

Cavalieri: With the poet as well. With you the vibration is first?

Brodsky: Some tune…some tune which has oddly enough some psychological weight, a diminution and you try to fit something into that. The only organic thing that is pertinent to poetry, is like the way you live. You exist and gradually you arrive at a certain tune in your head. The lines develop like wrinkles, like grey hair. They are wrinkles in a sense, especially with what goes into composing…That gives you wrinkles! It's in a sense the work of time upon the man. It chisels you or disfigures you or makes your skin parched.

Cavalieri: So it's eroding you and you carry it around?

Brodsky: You do with sentences what time has done to you.

Cavalieri: In the formation of it, are you carrying parts of the stanzas around with you also?

Brodsky: Of course you do, yes.

Cavalieri: And the mechanics…You use longhand first?

Brodsky: Yes, I don't have a computer. Then I type with one finger. Computers have no use to me.

Cavalieri: Which finger?

Brodsky: Index finger, right hand.

Cavalieri: I saw a poem of yours in The New Yorker *last January and I wondered how many poems you get published a year in periodicals.*

Brodsky: It varies. For the last year I published about ten.

Cavalieri: Ten new poems in one year. That's quite a bit.

Brodsky. Yes if you're lucky. I spent half the year in Ireland and published several poems in *The Times Literary Supplement*.

Cavalieri: It is said that when you were in a work camp at the time of ***T. S. Eliot****'s death you were able to write your verse to him in twenty-four hours.*

Brodsky: Two or three days, yes.

Cavalieri: So you are extremely focused but he also meant a lot to you. That helps.

Brodsky: It did. Also, extraordinarily, under the circumstances, I had a form or shape for that poem. I borrowed from **W.H. Auden**'s poem "In Memory of Yeats." I made some changes. I made the first part a slightly different rhyme scheme.

Cavalieri: And you learned English by translating poetry?

Brodsky: By reading it and translating it.

Cavalieri: Line by line by line. How do you think your English is now?

Brodsky: I don't know. Sometimes even I am satisfied but often I don't know what to say. I am at a loss.

Cavalieri: Don't you think we are in any language?

Brodsky: With a mongrel like me it's perhaps more frequent.

Cavalieri: Do you think and dream in both languages?

Brodsky: People think in thoughts and dream in dreams. They collate these in language. When we grow up we become fluent in this and for that reason we believe that we think in languages.

Cavalieri: Do you ever use material from your dreams?

Brodsky: Frequently. Several times I composed poems when I just woke up. **W.H. Auden** suggested to keep a pad with a pencil to jot a few things, but mine came out as jibberish.

Cavalieri: Dreams are not always useful except for the feeling load.

Brodsky: The subconscious is a source but a composition is a highly rational enterprise in many ways. You may think of the dream as inspiration but then you type it down and then you begin to correct it. You replace the words. It is an invasion of the reasoning. Poetry is an incurably semantic art and you can't really help it. You have to make sense. That's what distinguishes it from other arts…from all other arts.

Cavalieri: You call it the highest point of human locution.

Brodsky: That's what it is.

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Videos

01] Joseph Brodsky: A Maddening Space.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SF2LmNShojY [55:16]

A documentary on the Nobel Prize winning poet Joseph Brodsky. Biography as well as extensive interviews and readings with Brodsky; guest appearance by poet, Derek Walcott.

02] Joseph Brodsky - The John Adams Institute
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6lo0CXUws8 [1:07:19]
In the lecture series American Literature Today, the John Adams Institute presented an afternoon and an evening with the Russian/American poet and author Joseph Brodsky.
Joseph Brodsky, one of the greatest Russian poets of our time and winner of the 1987 Nobel Prize for Literature, was born in Leningrad in 1940. He was already an important young poet in the Soviet Union when he was charged with "social parasitism", because his poetry and his bohemian ways did not advance the causes of communism. He was sent to work in the Arctic Circle in 1964. In 1972 the Soviets decided they could get along without Joseph Brodsky altogether, and he was sent to Austria where W. H. Auden, who was living there at the time, helped the uprooted poet on his way to the U.S. There Brodsky became an ornament to university faculties, a familiar voice on the lecture circuit, a member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and eventually a Nobel Prize winner.

Keus Verheul was the moderator and was a personal friend of Brodsky's, having translated many of Brodsky's poems into Dutch.
At the beginning of the afternoon lecture, Joseph Brodsky unveiled a bust which sculptress Sylvia Willink-Quiel made of him. In 1985, Brodsky received a set of Willink reproductions which inspired him to write his poem "At Carel Willink's exposition". This poem so moved Willink's widow that in turn she decided to make a bust of Brodsky. Painter, poet, sculptress: each inspired and understood by the other.

03] Windham Campbell Prizes 2025 Joseph Brodsky
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0t_d_V_gY90[58:33]
04] Joseph Brodsky: Epitaph for a Centaur, Six Years Later
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNp3NOWYFEQ [1:02:13]
05] Amherst College: LitFest 2021 -- The Poet's Prose: Rereading Joseph Brodsky's Essays Today
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvXfm9FaDWE [58:55]

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20 Nov 1923

13 Jul 2014

Nadine Gordimer

Nobel Prize in Literature 1991

Born: 20 November 1923, Springs, South Africa
Died: 13 July 2014, Johannesburg, South Africa
Residence at the time of the award: South Africa

Prize motivation:

"who through her magnificent epic writing has -
in the words of Alfred Nobel - been of
very great benefit to humanity"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1991/gordimer/facts/}

Links to Other Sites

[01] On Nadine Gordimer from Pegasos Author's Calendar

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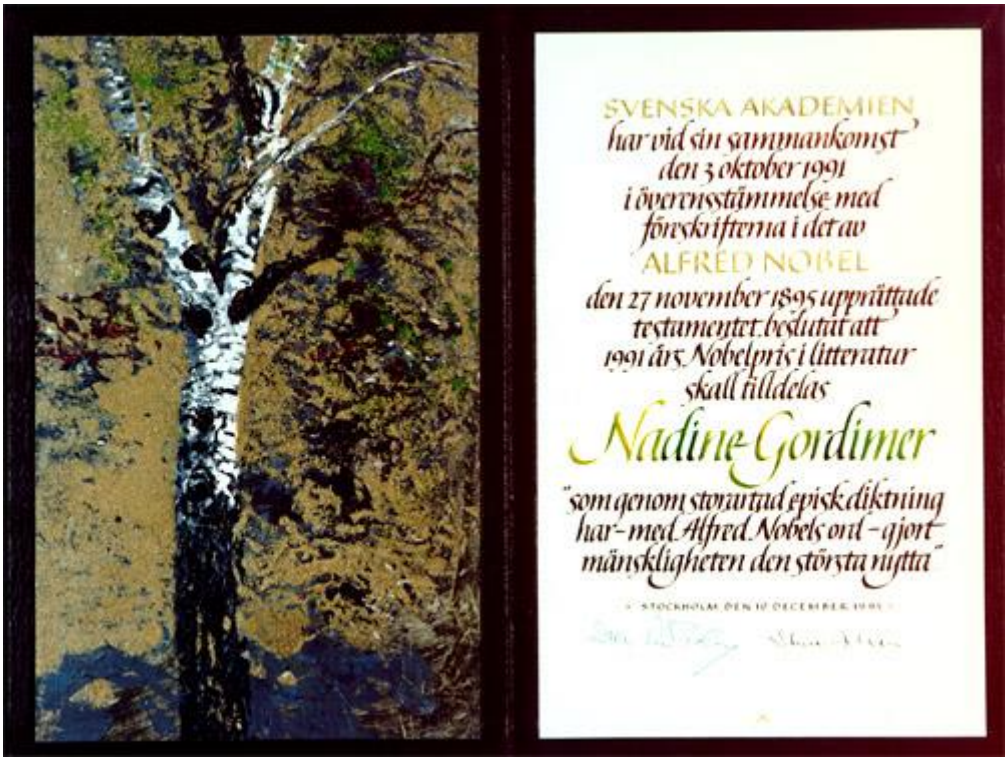
Nobel Diploma



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Nobel Symposia

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1991/gordimer/symposia/

During the Nobel Symposia, held on 5 December 2001 at the Swedish Academy, Nadine Gordimer delivered her public lecture *'Witness: The Inward Testimony'*.

Read more about the Nobel Centennial Symposia.

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Professor Sture Allén,
Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy

Translation from the Swedish text

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Art is on the side of the oppressed, Nadine Gordimer says in one of her essays, urging us to think before we dismiss this heretical idea about the freedom of art. If art is freedom, she asks, how could it exist within the oppressors?

Nadine Gordimer agrees with last year's Laureate, Octavio Paz, in asserting the importance of regaining the meanings of words, as a first step in the critical process. She has had the courage to write as if censorship did not exist, and so has seen her books banned, time after time.

Above all, it is people, individual men and women, that have captured her and been captured by her. It is their lives, their heaven and hell, that absorb her. The outer reality is ever present, but it is through her characters that the whole historical process is crystallized.

Conveying to the reader a powerful sense of authenticity, and with wide human relevance, she makes visible the extremely complicated and utterly inhuman living conditions in the world of racial segregation. She feels political responsibility, and does not shy away from its consequences, but will not allow it to affect her as a writer: her texts are not agitatorial, not progandistic. Still, her works and the deep insights she offers contribute to shaping reality.

In one of her great novels we meet Maureen, the stronger of husband and wife in a family who, with the help of their boy, have fled the fighting, taking refuge in a hut in his native village. Here, gradually, the strains on their mode of life, language and everyday relations become unbearable. One day Maureen notices a helicopter landing. She does not know whether it brings friends or enemies but, stricken with unspeakable horror, she instinctively leaves the hut and starts running towards the sound. She runs ever faster and more frantically. She runs with all the suppressed trust of a lifetime. She runs for her survival, the enemy of all responsibility.

This is the closing scene of the novel. Were there still possibilities ahead of her? Or was this the very end? To Maureen and what she stands for, the future appears to hold out the opposite of utopia, a dystopia. This is not Nadine Gordimer's only vision, but it is one which she has found it necessary to give expression to.

In this way, artistry and morality fuse.

People are more important than principles.
A truly living human being cannot remain neutral.
No one is in possession of all goodness, and no one has a monopoly of evil.
Irony does not need any prompting.
Children who meet, gladly meet halfway.
The power of love makes the mountain tremble.

Thoughts and impressions such as these are called forth by novels like *A Guest of Honour*, *The Conservationist, Burger's Daughter, July's People*, and *My Son's Story*. However, in a manner as absorbing as in her novels, Nadine Gordimer develops her penetrating depiction of character, her compassion and her powers of precise wording in her short stories, in collections like *Six Feet of the Country* and, as yet untranslated, *A Soldier's Embrace* and *Something Out There*.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is remarkable how often Nadine Gordimer succeeds in her artistic intent – to burn a hole through the page.

Dear Miss Gordimer,

Ninety years ago, the prize citation mentioned "the qualities of both heart and intellect". Indeed, these words apply no less today when the Swedish Academy points to the Nobelian concept of outstanding literary achievement as an important means of conferring benefit on mankind, in terms of human value and freedom of speech. It is my privilege and pleasure, on behalf of the Swedish Academy, to convey to you the warmest congratulations on the Nobel Prize in Literature 1991 and to invite you to receive the Prize from the hands of His Majesty the King.

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Banquet Speech

Nadine Gordimer's speech at the Nobel Banquet, December 10, 1991

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Fellow Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the six-year-old daughter of a friend of mine overheard her father telling someone that I had been awarded the Nobel Prize, she asked whether I had ever received it before. He replied that the Prize was something you could get only once. Whereupon the small girl thought a moment: 'Oh' she said, 'so it's like chicken-pox.'

Well, Flaubert said that 'honours dishonour' the writer, and Jean-Paul Sartre declined this particular honour, but whether as malediction or malady one cannot say. I certainly find being the recipient at this celebratory dinner more pleasurable and rewarding than chicken-pox, having now in my life experienced both.

But the small girl was not entirely wrong. Writing is indeed, some kind of affliction in its demands as the most solitary and introspective of occupations. We writers do not have the encouragement and mateyness I imagine, and even observe, among people whose work is a group activity. We are not orchestrated; poets sing unaccompanied, and prose writers have no cue on which to come in, each with an individual instrument of expression to make the harmony or dissonance complete. We must live fully in order to secrete the substance of our work, but we have to work alone. From this paradoxical inner solitude our writing is what Roland Barthes called 'the essential gesture' towards the people among whom we live, and to the world; it is the hand held out with the best we have to give.

When I began to write as a very young person in a rigidly racist and inhibited colonial society, I felt, as many others did, that I existed marginally on the edge of the world of ideas, of imagination and beauty. These, taking shape in poetry and fiction, drama, painting and sculpture, were exclusive to that distant realm known as 'overseas'. It was the dream of my contemporaries, white and black, to venture there as the only way to enter the world of artists. It took the realization that the colour bar – I use that old, concrete image of racism – was like the gate of the law in Kafka's parable, which was closed to the supplicant throughout his life because he didn't understand that only he could open it. It took this to make us realize that what we had to do to find the world was to enter our own world fully, first. We had to enter through the tragedy of our own particular place.

If the Nobel awards have a special meaning, it is that they carry this concept further. In their global eclecticism they recognize that no single society, no country or continent can presume to create a truly human culture for the world. To be among laureates, past and present, is at least to belong to some sort of one world.

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Interview

Interview, April 2005

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1991/gordimer/interview/

Interview with the 1991 Nobel Laureate in Literature, Nadine Gordimer, by freelance journalist Simon Stanford, 26 April 2005.

Nadine Gordimer talks about her childhood in South Africa; how she became aware of the racism around her (7:01); her first novel and the development of her writing (13:02); changes in South African society (20:10); the anthology 'Telling Tales' (25:50); and receiving the Nobel Prize (30:32).

Interview transcript

Nadine Gordimer, Nobel Literature Laureate 1991, welcome to our interview.
Nadine Gordimer: Thank you.

From what origins did Nadine Gordimer come to be born in a gold mining town in South Africa?
Nadine Gordimer: The usual sort of background for whites in South Africa. My mother came from England and my father came from Latvia.

Is that typical white middle class type of background?
Nadine Gordimer: No, what I meant was that almost every white person, for perhaps a generation, two generations, even three generations before, they come from various parts of Europe. So mine is not *the* background, it is just one of a number.

And what was the sense during your youth, during your childhood; did you get a sense that you were part of an elite that owned South Africa?
Nadine Gordimer: It went without saying, if you could call what my background was an elite. It was a small gold mining town, but of course, being white in South Africa, up until the change came and till we got our freedom, to be white was to be automatically belonging to the ruling caste, no matter how humble you were as a white.

And did you feel that humility at the beginning?

Nadine Gordimer: No, I didn't feel it at all, because it's natural for a child to accept the milieu in which he or she lives. I went to a convent school. Of course it was also gender restricted as well. So I went to this convent school. Everybody was white; the other girls were white. On Saturdays when you got your pocket money and could go to the movies it never occurred to me, as a child, I think, or to any of the others as a small child, that there were no black children there; black children didn't go.

> … without that library I don't think I would ever have been a writer …

The most important thing was that the local municipal library … My mother read a lot and she, having read to us, my sister and me when we were little, by the time I was six years old I was inscribed in the children's library and that library indeed I still regard as my principle source of education, because without that library I don't think I would ever have been a writer, because the only way you can become a writer, the only training is to read and if I'd been a black kid I couldn't have used that library.

At what point in your childhood did that realisation come, that you were part of a privileged elite and that there was an enormous imbalance?
Nadine Gordimer: I think it came in, you know, in less formal terms, it came from experience. When I walked to my convent school across the veldt, on the left was one of the big mines, the Springs mine, and there was the compound where the black mineworkers lived and they came from all over Africa and I was always warned, now you know don't go anywhere near the mine boys. So you were instilled with the fear of blackness even though there was the black maid of all work, nanny, whatever in the house, but of course she was a woman. She was black, but at least she didn't seem to represent the sexual threat that has always existed about white attitudes towards black, what they regarded as a threat, as if every black mineworker was waiting to jump on some ugly little 10 year old schoolgirl. But to be serious about it, there were the mine concession stores.

The mines would build a row of little stores and they would rent them out as a concession to local people who wanted to run them and the idea was to keep the miners from going into the town. So that I would pass these stores and then I would see how the mineworkers, many of them still in their semi travel dress, blankets and so on, and what have now become dreadlocks but were just the way they wore their hair, coming along and they would want to buy something. Now the counter, there'd be a counter and there would be a wire

across it; strong wire, kind of fence between the shopkeeper and the customer and the customer would point at this or that and the owner of the shop would take it down and then the black man, he couldn't try anything on, he couldn't touch anything to see whether it was what he wanted. He would have to push his money through and then he would get the goods. And child as I was, I suppose 11, 12, I couldn't help thinking this is strange, because when I go with my mother into town and I'm buying a pair of shoes or a dress or something, we go into a little booth and we try it on. Why do these black people just have to point something, they can't even look at it and see what it really, what quality it really has. So it was incidents like this that made me think about the difference.

Also the question of liquor raids. It was of course at that time, I'm talking about the '30s now, late '30s. It was forbidden for blacks to buy liquor and so people made their own beer everywhere, all over the place, in the backyards of white houses and when I was a little older, I think about 11, then there was a raid one day. I woke up, my parents woke up. We went out into the yard and there were the policemen, white and black, turning out everything in the servant's room, in this old retainer of ours we'd had since I was two years old, turning her mattress over, pulling her clothes out, looking for beer and my parents stood by, didn't say "Where's your warrant to search? You walk into my property." It was simply accepted and so was a humiliation of the woman and indeed, one of the first adult stories I ever wrote came out of that.

Only two to three years later when, at the age of 15, I wrote a story which indeed appeared in 1939, the year the war broke out, in a journal, a literary journal in South Africa. Nobody knew that I was a child, but the fact that I'm wanting to point out is that this was such a traumatic thing that I saw, with this woman, that these two things together that I described to you, began to make me think about the way we lived and why we lived like that and who were we to have the privileges that nobody else had if they were the wrong colour?

Do you think that once you began to recognise that injustice, that humiliation, you began to sort of piece together a more three-dimensional picture of black South Africans as opposed to the many South Africans who either supported or ignored apartheid, who never really let black people come into focus as real people to them?
Nadine Gordimer: Yes, but I think you have to look at the circumstances. It was unthinkable for me to meet or know black people who would share my interests, with whom, in other words, there could be some sort of natural rapport and meeting. It was always on the servant/master basis and even if

you were the child of the master or the mistress, you still had this particular position, but being troubled about it and, great reader as I always was, beginning to find out that there was something called racism that existed in the world and I was living in it, I was part of it.

… so I met one or two black people, with whom I had far more in common …

And then when I was older and went very briefly to, took the train every day and went to the university, and there for the first time I met, even then there were one or two, there were a few young blacks. Remember the university of course was whites only, but there were certain courses that were not available in the black universities and then, as a concession, at graduate level, post graduate level, a few blacks would come in and so I met one or two black people, with whom I had far more in common than I had with the young whites that I knew in the town.

I wasn't sporty. Many of the things that they did were of no particular interest to me and here were young people, black, who were trying to write, who were beginning to write. So we had this enormous, not just ambition, we had this enormous way of approach to life and the mystery of life and social questions in our own lives and then I began, at that age, to make black friends. And then as I, myself, became a young published writer, then I moved into a different circle, which was, again, journalists, actors, people in the arts who normally indeed don't follow the rules, the conservative rules, and where the feeling about the incredible distortions of racism, not only the oppression of blacks, but the distortions in your personality, in your mind as a white, these became very much part of my life and indeed started my way to freedom from racism, from racist ideas that I'd been inculcated at school, at home, everywhere since childhood.

You describe yourself as a natural writer. Perhaps some of those other people that you met were also natural writers.
Nadine Gordimer: Yes.

You know, there was the recognition of the injustice. There must have been the anger that you felt. What nurtured and fed your voice?
Nadine Gordimer: Well, I suppose that did, and then, of course, it meant that this extended to the times when people who said what they thought got into trouble and if you were black the consequences were dire. So that your connections, which had been personal and through the arts, became political

and your friends got into trouble and you found yourself having to, indeed, when questioned by the police to tell lies, to say that you hadn't seen them or you didn't know them. Apartheid made fantastic liar out of everybody who was against it. You had to in order to your friends and others to survive, never mind yourself. So that the two really then developed together.

You have a whole generation who grew up under apartheid whose children are now getting a different kind of education. Is there a sort of a generation gap which doesn't offer the type of support that is necessary to nurture young writers?
Nadine Gordimer: Yes, but this is nothing to be distinguished by colour. Black children and white children, they come home from school and they turn on television and the bedtime story doesn't exist. You put the kid in front of the television and turn on the kiddies programme and that's that. You don't read to them anymore. And when you're being read to, probably you are, you're young but you're of a generation where you read to probably, and then you begin to look at the words and want to recognise them for yourself and you become literate. We have an enormous problem of illiteracy. We have very high illiteracy and I put it down to the fact that people have got no access to the joy and the pleasure of books. Having to read a particular book in school is one thing, it's a task, but to amuse yourself and to let you enter into another world, that's really something different, but of course that is becoming almost universal. I was reading the other day how in England and in America the functioning literacy, the standard has dropped.

So you moved beyond the sort of particularities of apartheid. You see that as a universal problem?
Nadine Gordimer: Oh yes, this has got nothing to do with apartheid. This is the threat of the image against the word, the written word, the published word in a book.

Your early writing, *The Lying Days*, was that a sort of coming of age, a realisation of ... the first articulation of your understanding of the society around you?
Nadine Gordimer: I had been writing stories, which indeed were looking at questioning how we lived and then that first novel, it's the only thing I've ever written in my 14 novels, in my nine or ten books of stories; it's the only autobiographical thing. I'm not a writer who uses her own life. My writing is widely ranged in terms of who is the central character, whether it's in the first person, whether it's in the third person, whether it's a mixture of the two, but I'm not an autobiographical writer. But the first novel, like everybody's first novel really, had lots of autobiographical elements in it and I think the first

novel is usually some kind of revenge against your background and, you know, you've got to get it off your chest.

You write from very, very diverse points of view, very diverse characters, diverse situations. You write about gender, you write about sex, you write about injustice, you write about race.
Nadine Gordimer: But I write about it from within. I don't write about it. I write about how it shapes the people who are shaped by it. To write about it is to write nonfiction, to write essays, which I have done of course, but in my novels and stories they're not about …

You write very much as an insider, from very diverse positions. I've just been reading some of your short stories in *Loot*. For instance "Mission Statement", you know, it's a very, very intimate portrait from within a particular situation, from within somebody's life. How do you manage to get under the skin of such very, very diverse characters in diverse situations?
Nadine Gordimer: I can only say I don't know. I really don't know.

But is there a process, because obviously you display an intimate knowledge in that case of the world of an aid worker. Do you actively set out to experience and get into these situations, get to know these kind of people?
Nadine Gordimer: No, I'm not a journalist, I don't do this, but of course I have known, in my long life, a variety of people and, as I've said, there is this curiosity about other people and also the alertness to what they are thinking or doing and the way that they give away their real feelings. But I can't explain it, and I don't think any writer can explain it. It happens and of course there are some people who, and there are some occasions in your life when there is one of your characters is going to be engaged in some particular aspect of life, about which you don't know very much, so then I, others may enjoy this, but I have to force myself, very reluctantly, to go into what is called research to make sure that I haven't used the wrong term or whatever, but that's pretty unlikely. For instance I could never write an historical novel because I haven't the capacity, the ability to do the research that is necessary.

Education. You attended Wits University. You didn't graduate.
Nadine Gordimer: No, I was only there for a year doing occasional courses.

Isn't that rather unusual for an author of your stature that you have, you know, the process has come from within? How have you developed

yourself as a writer? How have you developed the powers of language, the descriptive powers, the idiom that you have created? Where does that all come from? Is that just hard work?
Nadine Gordimer: Books, no from reading. From reading since I was six years old, truly.

Is that a real discipline?

> No, the reading was never a discipline, you know, an enormous pleasure …

Nadine Gordimer: And living of course. No, the reading was never a discipline, you know, an enormous pleasure, an unending pleasure in my life but one can't explain it. I suppose the love of words comes into it but then where do the words come from if you haven't had a long academic education, which I certainly didn't have. I don't know. Would I have been a different kind of writer, I sometimes ask myself, and, on the other hand, I often see in academics' fiction the stiffness and the set of academic language coming in. So maybe I was lucky. The only thing I really regret is that I would like to have studied languages, more languages.

Other languages?
Nadine Gordimer: Oh yes, I mean obviously English is my own but just to have studied foreign languages and not to have learnt an African language. So like most other South Africans, there I am sitting with my black friends and we're all talking in English and then I may go out of the room perhaps to get a bucket of ice or something and come back, we're having drinks together, and they have broken into their own language. They're talking Setswana, they're talking Zulu, whatever, and I am then a stranger in my own country and among my own people. So that's a great regret in my life.

You speculated a little bit that you might have been a different type of a writer if you'd had a more academic background. Of course you might have been a very different type of writer if you had not experienced all the injustice, the confrontation, the drama, the trauma of growing up in the side that you did.
Nadine Gordimer: No, I wouldn't have been. If you're going to be a writer you can make the death of a canary important, you could connect it to the whole chain of life and the mystery of life. To me what is the purpose of writing? For me personally, I don't know others, it is really to explain the mystery of life and the mystery of life includes of course the personal, the political, the forces

that make us what we are while there's another force from inside battling to make us something else.

What stories are we going to see coming out?
Nadine Gordimer: I must say, on the other subject, that I'm an atheist. Perhaps if I had a religion then I would think that there was some answer to the mystery of life, but as an atheist and in all humbleness, I know that there's no religion that can give me that answer.

For many years a lot of South African culture, art, performance, writing has been informed very much by the struggle against apartheid. Is there going to be a kind of liberation in the arts where people are able to confront and express more personal, more intimate, more self discovery now?
Nadine Gordimer: I wouldn't like to see literature turn inward. I wouldn't like to see it contemplating its own literary navel. The change is so extraordinary and as a new generation grows up in totally different circumstances from those that I, my children or my children's children would really know, there is so much unexplored, there's so much of the mystery of the way we love to be explored now and I am waiting now, not quite so patiently anymore, to see some of this expressed in young writers at present.

> I wouldn't like to see literature turn inward.

There's some people who are writing very well but they're obsessed by the past. It's particularly black writers and it's more understandable then because the weight of all that was on their backs, holding them down, changing the lives of their parents and grandparents and so on.

Changing, what am I saying, they were not changed, each one was exactly like the one before. Then this seems to be something they want to express all this. It's the return of the repressed in Freudian terms, but it seems to be happening with whites as well and there's been quite a rush of books, it's the breast beating book. Oh, I couldn't help it, my parents were racists and so, you know, and I was always uncomfortable about it. This is something that you should go to your psychotherapist for, not bore everybody else with it. This is not to say that white experience is irrelevant, of course it wasn't, but I'd love to see much more of what is happening now, because to me little things are they're not so little. They're little incidents but they have huge social implications.

Near where I live there's a primary school, which of course was always white. Very nice school, not too big. Now, if I walk past there and it's break, lunch break time, the kids are coming out, they're smallish because it's a primary school and it still gives me a sort of start when I see two boys, a black boy and a white boy. You know how you've all wrestled, you were a boy and it's natural for little boys to kind of play battles, wrestling with one another, but this is a white and a black. This was unthinkable even in my children's time and then go to a play or to a movie and there you have a mixed couple; a black/white couple on this side, you have two blacks there. This gives me a shock of pleasure.

And you declared yourself in your public life, very early on, as a very staunch and active opponent of apartheid. Now it's a new era and I mean just 2001 you had a situation where *July's People* was taken off the recommended …
Nadine Gordimer: In one province.

In one province, exactly.
Nadine Gordimer: Not a national …

… and it ended very quickly but that must have been something of a shock. It might have been just an aberration but are you still confronting the injustices of the new South African society?
Nadine Gordimer: Oh yes, indeed. I'm not talking about this little incident with *July's People*. I'm talking about for instance the position on AIDS, this reluctance on the government. It's taken such a long time to get them to move at all and we still have a Minister of Health who is very reluctant indeed to accept that antiretrovirals are absolutely necessary. No-one's denying that you also have to be decently fed, that you have to have living conditions which allow you the treatment indeed to be backed up by the nourishment in your body, but this denial against the need for the drugs is something that I've spoken out and continue to feel very strongly about and regret very much that our President, whom I admire and support in the other things that he does, I think he's an excellent President, I cannot accept or understand his lack of determination and his lack of being convinced that we have to tackle HIV/AIDS with drugs, with the appropriate drugs and that the connection between HIV and AIDS is proven over and over and over again and it troubles me that he who is a man of really remarkable intellect, very much a man of the world, that he somehow denies this.

You compiled this extraordinary collection of stories from very distinguished writers and this is a global statement. Can you tell us a little bit about *Telling Tales*?
Nadine Gordimer: Well, now it's I suppose 15 months ago, there were, and it continues of course, these wonderful big musical events, mainly pop stars, musicians and singers but also some of the classical musicians as well, but mainly the pop stars, holding these enormous gigs where they have enormous performances, where indeed they raise money for the cause of HIV/AIDS sufferers and, at the same time, made people aware, roused people's awareness of this pandemic disease and did a lot, I think, to give a shove to the whole problem of denial and the shame that people feel is attached to having contracted the disease. And I thought, well fine, there's Bono, there's Geldof, there's everybody else doing these things, what are the writers doing?

PEN, the international organisation of writers, which has been wonderful over 30 years and continues for writers who become politically oppressed and indeed hunted down by various regimes, it's still going on in some places. They have done wonderful work there but there hasn't been a peep out of PEN about HIV/AIDS, and you would think that they would know writers who had succumbed to this. So I thought, well it's no good going on grumbling about it and saying why doesn't this one do something, why doesn't that do something? Well, what can you do as an individual?

So out of the blue I wrote off to 20 writers and said: Look, I have this idea, would you let me have a story?

So then I thought, what about a book of really lovely stories, wonderful stories. There are plenty of books about HIV/AIDS, textbooks and manuals to help you if you do contract the disease and so on. But these should be stories that are not on that subject at all and, quite commercially, go for big names, wonderful stories and try and get them published at a time, especially near Christmas when people are looking for gifts, but in other words to have a book that people will want to buy for themselves and give as a present. So out of the blue I wrote off to 20 writers and said: Look, I have this idea, would you let me have a story? I didn't write to people who were mainly novelists because I don't think that bits out of novels work very well. So I wrote to them all, from the five Nobel Prize winners and a lot of others, and from Woody Allen to Günter Grass and John Updike and, you know, everybody whose stories I think are really wonderful and I admire.

The response was marvellous. I didn't get one refusal and they all sent me these wonderful stories and then of course publisher. I went first to my own

publisher in America and said, look, I don't know how you'll feel about this but will you publish this book and will you take only production costs? You will not get a penny of royalties, the writers are not going to be paid and all the money will go indeed to the Treatment Action Campaign since we are such a heavily infected area and Treatment Action Campaign of course now, as you know, works quite a bit in the surrounding territories as well, and to my astonishment they were very pleased, said we'll do it. My English publisher the same and now I have 14 publishers worldwide. It's just come out in Greek; I got it the other day, a copy of it. It's come out in German and indeed it's on the way in France, in Italy, China. You name it, it's all over the place. Russia.

It's a fantastic effort. I haven't read all of them but I've loved what I've read so far.
Nadine Gordimer: The stories are really lovely, so the people they buy it and, at the same time, they have the great pleasure of knowing that what they're enjoying is also helping other people, but I don't know how to thank enough the writers who generously gave what we have, you know, our talent and the publishers, after all they're business people, and 14 publishers agreed to this.

To get back to the Nobel Prize. Tell us about it? I mean 1991. Did you get a phone call, you knew that you were on the shortlist? What was the procedure?
Nadine Gordimer: Well, I'd been on the shortlist for a few years, as you usually are I think, and journalists would phone me and say, you're on the shortlist, you're probably going to get the Nobel Prize, what do you think about it? And I would say, if I ever get it I'll tell you, goodbye, and put down the phone. Finished. And on this occasion I happened to be in New York for another reason and staying with my son. I got up before anybody else did in the apartment because I wanted to call somebody in London and when the time difference, you know, was convenient, but as I went into the kitchen where the phone was the phone rang and indeed it was a Swedish journalist who had found out, through a friend in Sweden, where I was and phoned to tell me that I'd got the Prize. So that was really out of the blue because I think that year, probably because I was away, no-one had phoned and said you're on the shortlist again.

How did that feel? How has that affected your life?
Nadine Gordimer: Of course it's a wonderful thing to get because it is the premier prize in the world since it's not just one country. I've also had the Booker but was for Commonwealth and people who get the Pulitzer here and so on or the National Book Award, you've got to be an American to get it and that's ok, these are national prizes, but the Nobel, that is both, its strength and

some people would say its weakness is that it looks at books from all over the world in all languages.

I've come to the conclusion this is a very, very good thing. For instance someone whom I now consider, and I should have long before but he didn't exist in translation sufficiently for me to have noticed his work, that's the Portuguese writer, José Saramago, who is a very great writer and suddenly it's announced he's got the Nobel Prize and I'm saying, who, you know, never heard of him. Then of course the translations came out and I realised what a wonderful thing that someone who was not widely known now is recognised worldwide in so very many languages.

Does that give extra force to your voice? You get a bigger readership, you get the recognition?

Nadine Gordimer: You know it's a very moot point about readership. Probably the readership thing is for the year when you get it, for the most recent book, but then after that, you know, it's a line on a cover. I don't think it makes all that much difference. More and more writers are expected to be performers so that if you have a new book out, if it's a good book of course, if it gets well reviewed, then you must be going round talking about it and being on talk shows and things. So that side of it comes into the sales.

> More and more writers are expected to be performers …

But changing your life. You mentioned it gets you … Of course it gives you a voice, shall we sa,y that is likely to be listened to a bit more. So for instance, in the case of *Telling Tales*, it probably helped me when I wrote to the writers and it helped me with the publishers to get this off the ground and then of course you get invited, my god, I think they don't even know what kind of Nobel Prize you've got. So you suddenly get invited to open some conference on saving the whales or whatever, you know, in various parts of the world. But, on the other hand, it does give you a voice when there's something that you care about, that you want to give some push to.

And of course, every year, once you've got it, you have the privilege of absolutely confidentially, only to the Foundation, of putting up, nominating someone for the current year. So since '91 … it's absolutely confidential. People send you their books and say, could you please put me forward and so on, just ignore it. Since '91, and I've made use of this privilege each year, I've had only two successes and that I can tell you because they got the Prize. The first one was the great German writer, Günter Grass, and the other was Kenzaburo Oe, the Japanese. So I don't know, it's a very low average.

So you can tell me who you're going to nominate this year? I promise I won't tell anyone.
Nadine Gordimer: No, I know.

So where to next? What are you doing now?
Nadine Gordimer: Writing, what else would I be doing?

Do you have a direction?
Nadine Gordimer: Well, I have recently finished a new novel, which will come out toward the end of this year.

Any details?
Nadine Gordimer: No.

No.
Nadine Gordimer: I never talk about what I've just written.

To conclude, I'm looking at the Nobel website and I'm looking at this interview and I'm a young aspiring writer, what would be your most valuable words of advice?

> I always repeat; read, read, read …

Nadine Gordimer: Boringly, I always repeat; read, read, read and don't read the book coming in a stream of words on a screen, don't depend on that, which you now have in your car and on your, god knows, your cell phone and everything. Please, just go to the library and read.

Then you go through the stage, when you're very young, that you begin to imitate the writers that you admire but that will pass. If you've got your own voice you will hear it. So there we are.

Thank you very much for being with us.
Nadine Gordimer: My pleasure.

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Prose

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1991/gordimer/prose/

The 1991 Nobel Laureate in Literature Nadine Gordimer reads her short story 'Loot' from "Loot and Other Stories". The video was recorded at Harvard University in April, 2005.

Loot

Once upon our time, there was an earthquake: but this one is the most powerful ever recorded since the invention of the Richter scale made possible for us to measure apocalyptic warnings.

It tipped a continental shelf. These tremblings often cause floods; this colossus did the reverse, drew back the ocean as a vast breath taken. The most secret level of our world lay revealed: the sea-bedded – wrecked ships, facades of houses, ballroom candelabra, toilet bowl, pirate chest, TV screen, mail-coach, aircraft fuselage, canon, marble torso, Kalashnikov, metal carapace of a tourist bus-load, baptismal font, automatic dishwasher, computer, swords sheathed in barnacles, coins turned to stone. The astounded gaze raced among these things; the population who had fled from their toppling houses to the martime hills, ran down. Where terrestrial crash and bellow had terrified them, there was naked silence. The saliva of the sea glistened upon these objects; it is given that time does not, never did, exist down there where the materiality of the past and the present as they lie has no chronological order, all is one, all is nothing – or all is possessible at once.

People rushed to take; take, take. This was – when, anytime, sometime – valuable, that might be useful, what was this, well someone will know, that must have belonged to the rich, it's mine now, if you don't grab what's over there someone else will, feet slipped and slithered on seaweed and sank in soggy sand, gasping sea-plants gaped at them, no-one remarked there were no fish, the living inhabitants of this unearth had been swept up and away with the water. The ordinary opportunity of looting shops which was routine to people during the political uprisings was no comparison. Orgiastic joy gave men, women and their children strength to heave out of the slime and sand what they did not know they wanted, quickened their staggering gait as they ranged, and this was more than profiting by happenstance, it was robbing the power of nature before which they had fled helpless. Take, take; while grabbing they were able to forget the wreck of their houses and the loss of time-bound possessions there. They had tattered the silence with their shouts to one another and under these cries like the cries of the

absent seagulls they did not hear a distant approach of sound rising as a great wind does. And then the sea came back, engulfed them to add to its treasury.

That is what is known; in television coverage that really had nothing to show but the pewter skin of the depths, in radio interviews with those few infirm, timid or prudent who had not come down from the hills, and in newspaper accounts of bodies that for some reason the sea rejected, washed up down the coast somewhere.

But the writer knows something no-one else knows; the sea-change of the imagination.

Now listen, there's a man who has wanted a certain object (what) all his life. He has a lot of – things – some of which his eye falls upon often, so he must be fond of, some of which he doesn't notice, deliberately, that he probably shouldn't have acquired but cannot cast off, there's an art noveau lamp he reads by, and above his bed-head a Japanese print, a Hokusai, 'The Great Wave', he doesn't really collect oriental stuff, although if it had been on the wall facing him it might have been more than part of the furnishings, it's been out of sight behind his head for years. All these – things – but not the one.

He's a retired man, long divorced, chosen an old but well-appointed villa in the maritime hills as the site from which to turn his back on the assault of the city. A woman from the village cooks and cleans and doesn't bother him with any other communication. It is a life blessedly freed of excitement, he's had enough of that kind of disturbance, pleasurable or not, but the sight from his lookout of what could never have happened, never ever have been vouchsafed, is a kind of command. He is one of those who are racing out over the glistening sea-bed, the past – detritus-treasure, one and the same – stripped bare.

Like all the other looters with whom he doesn't mix, has nothing in common, he races from object to object, turning over the shards of painted china, the sculptures created by destruction, abandonment and rust, the brine-vintaged wine casks, a plunged racing motorcycle, a dentist's chair, his stride landing on disintegrated human ribs and mettarsals he does not identify. But unlike the others, he takes nothing – until: there, ornate with tresses of orange-brown seaweed, stuck-fast with nacreous shells and crenellations of red coral, is the object. (A mirror?) It's as if the impossible is true; he knew that was where it was, beneath the sea, that's why he didn't know what it was, could never find it before. It could be revealed

only by something that had never happened, the greatest paroxysm of our earth ever measured on the Richter scale.

He takes it up, the object, the mirror, the sand pours off it, the water that was the only bright glance left to it streams from it, he is taking it back with him, taking possession at last.

And the great wave comes from behind his bed-head and takes him.

His name well-known in the former regime circles in the capital is not among the survivors. Along with him among the skeletons of the latest victims, with the ancient pirates and fishermen, there are those dropped from planes during the dictatorship so that with the accomplice of the sea they would never be found. Who recognized them, that day, where they lie?

No carnation or rose floats.

Full fathom five.

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Article

Nadine Gordimer and the South African Experience

by Per Wästberg*

This article was published on 26 April 2001.

Warrior of the Imagination

Nadine Gordimer, born in 1923 and, in Seamus Heaney's words, one of "the guerrillas of the imagination," became the first South African and the seventh woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991.

Over half a century, Gordimer has written thirteen novels, over two hundred short stories, and several volumes of essays. Ten books are devoted to her works, and about

two hundred critical essays appear in her bibliography. Few living authors have kept so many academics occupied. The best study, in my view, is Stephen Clingman's *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993).

Gordimer's works have been translated into more than thirty languages. She herself has been awarded fifteen honorary doctorates and received major literary prizes. And she has given much personal support to individual writers.

Geiger Counter of Apartheid

Through the years, visitors have come to her house to inform, plead, and confess. She has been so deeply involved in the anti-apartheid struggle that one wonders how she managed to keep her integrity and observe South African society with such a discerning eye in her stories. In spite of her taking part in demonstrations, giving speeches, and travelling around the world supporting good causes, Gordimer is intensely private and guards her study, staying there through the mornings up to a late lunch. She does not make friends easily, says her oldest friend Anthony Sampson, but when she does she often retains them for life.

Nadine Gordimer with Anthony Sampson in
Johannesburg in the 1980s.

Gordimer endured the bleak decades, refusing to move abroad as so many others did. Her husband, Reinhold Cassirer, is a refugee from Nazi Germany, who served in the British Army in World War II. Her daughter settled in France, her son in New York; but she kept her lines open inside South Africa, out of commitment to black liberation and also for the sake of her own creativity and that of black South African writers who were silenced, for whom she had to speak.

Gordimer's Nobel Prize put the searchlight on a country in painful transition from an oppressive racism to a turbulent democracy. South Africa's literature is rich. But beyond doubt, Nadine Gordimer is the writer that most stubbornly has kept the true face of racism in front of us, in all its human complexities.

For fifty years, Gordimer has been the Geiger counter of apartheid and of the movements of people across the crust of South Africa. Her work reflects the psychic

vibrations within that country, the road from passivity and blindness to resistance and struggle, the forbidden friendships, the censored soul, and the underground networks. She has outlined a free zone where it was possible to try out, in imagination, what life beyond apartheid might be like. She wrote as if censorship did not exist and as if there were readers willing to listen. In her characters, the major currents of contemporary history intersect.

Gordimer has created individuals who make their moral choices behind private doors and in the public sphere. She has painted a social background subtler than anything presented by political scientists, thus providing an insight into the roots of the struggle and the mechanisms of change that no historian could have matched.

Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress

Early in her career, before other white writers, Gordimer saw the inventive buoyancy and playful courage of Sophiatown's and Soweto's black intellectuals and politicians, the circles where the young Nelson Mandela moved. Nadine's best friend, Bettie du Toit, was arrested in 1960, the year of Sharpeville, and so the political struggle entered her life. When Mandela and his colleagues were on trial for their lives, she became a close friend of their defence lawyers, Bram Fischer (the subject of *Burger's Daughter*) and George Bizos. Indeed, her proudest day, she says, was not when she was awarded the Nobel Prize (of which she gave a portion to the South African Congress of Writers) but when she testified at the Delmas trial in 1986, to save the lives of twenty-two ANC members, all of them accused of treason.

When Mandela was freed, Nadine Gordimer was one of the first he wished to see. "Strange to live in a country where there are still heroes." (*Burger's Daughter*)
Asked what she would write about when apartheid was over, Gordimer replied, "Life didn't end with apartheid; new life began." With her novels of the mid-1990's, *None to Accompany Me* and *The House Gun*, Gordimer proved that there is literary life after apartheid. In fact, her imagination was unbound; her books catch the social ambiguities of her time. She has not suffered the fate of some of her East European colleagues.

In the Transkei 1980.

Race and Gender

The writer's task is to transform experience, to enter into the existence of others, whether they be black or white, men or women, and to use the tension in both participating and standing at the side. With her restless energy and prodigious discipline, Gordimer is able to put herself not only in the mind, but also in the body of criminal and saint, male or female, black or white. She herself contains many persons in one body: she grew up speaking English in the African mining town of Springs, was a Jewish girl in a Catholic convent school, and then was educated at home. Lonely, with a domineering mother, she wrote from an early age and published her first adult story at 15.

Her father was a Jewish watchmaker from the border between Latvia and Lithuania. He opened a jeweller's shop in Springs in Transvaal and sold trophy cups to shooting clubs, as well as engagement rings. He read nothing. Her mother, a transplanted Londoner, read aloud to her daughters. Troubled by the way blacks were treated, she founded a crèche, a nursery school for black children. Gordimer's father, on the other hand, to avoid being conspicuous, turned a blind eye to any reminder of the oppression he had himself been subjected to in czarist Russia. This is the world of *The Lying Days*. Without the library in her small town, Nadine may not have become a writer; she was well aware that blacks were not permitted to use the local library.

Nadine Gordimer wearing an Arab necklace, 1953.

The Novel as History

Her first published volume appeared in 1949, the short-story collection *Face to Face. The Lying Days*, published in 1953, is about waking up from the naivete of a small colonial town. Gordimer wrote of "having a picnic in a beautiful cemetery where people were buried alive." South Africa is seen as a whites-only annex of European society, with middle-class suburbs, Sunday outings, and a blindness about anything lurking

below the surface. The vast black population is regarded as if it was there only to serve whites in industry and at home.

With her son Hugo, at home in Johannesburg about 1960.

"The novel as history is something other than a historical novel," Nadine Gordimer has remarked. Her protagonists and their points of view are constantly shifting. It may be Hillela, the sexual rebel, amoral and intuitive, demolishing apartheid in her personal sphere; or Bray in *A Guest of Honour*, a good man, a fragile liberal, betrayed by the old empire that found him too radical and by the new that tramples him down in passing. Through the novels, Gordimer's historical consciousness grows. In *A World of Strangers* (1958), we find the dilemma of well-meaning liberalism, while in *Occasion for Loving* (1963), it is the insight of the humanist that apartheid cannot be reformed by pious words. *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966) reflects Nelson Mandela's decision to switch from passive resistance to sabotage.

Gordimer joined the ANC before it was legal to do so and was impatient with whites who accused the ANC of autocratic tendencies instead of influencing it by joining. She has herself been both loyal and critical, all the time safeguarding the integrity of her imagination. Her inspiration, rather than her cause for despair, are the dangerous but rewarding contradictions of South African society today.

Love and Politics

When I first met Nadine Gordimer in early 1959, she had just published *A World of Strangers* and moved from the exploration of her upbringing in *The Lying Days* (1953) to her first attempt to focus on the growing anti-apartheid movement and the multiracialism of the *Drum* set of Can Themba, Lewis Nkosi, and others. Her third novel, *Occasion for Loving* (1963) deals with the failure of tolerance and humanism; the increasing absurdity of the race laws brought friendship and love across the colour bar to a halt. In her fourth novel, *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), the choice is between the naive idealism of saboteurs or the well-meaning cynicism of passive liberals.

In 1971, Gordimer published *A Guest of Honour*, a huge novel about the birth pangs of the new Africa. Individual history and great ideological perspectives are woven into

a chronicle whose protagonists embody the social, political, and moral problems arising when a victorious liberation front splits up into factions. Idealism and good will are almost drowned by a new brutality and a corruption similar to that under colonial rule. It deals with policy formulation and backroom bargaining and uses trade union jargon, local language transposed into English, settler ironies, and nationalist slogans. It is a Henry Jamesian enterprise where society and marriage, politics and landscapes, mix without obscuring the pattern.

With husband Reinhold Cassirer, 1969-70.

The Conservationist, which won the Booker Prize for 1974, evokes the sterility of the white community. This novel is a kind of sequel to the first classic of South African literature, Olive Schreiner's T*he Story of an African Farm* (1883), which can also be said of another remarkable novel centered on a farm, J M Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* (1977). Mehring, the Afrikaner antihero whose farm is as barren as his life, conserves both nature and the apartheid system, the one to keep the other at bay. He likes to preserve nature's variety but is in fact its exploiter; nor does nature return his sentimental love. In his moral vacuum, Mehring sees Africa returning to the possession of the blacks. Gordimer's powerful landscape descriptions become metaphors of the soul. Using Zulu creation myths, she looks in a new way at nature in South Africa, leaving her white predecessors in art and literature behind.

The Conservationist is a novel of ironies. Mehring is not a male chauvinist Boer; he is tolerant but no liberal, a financier using his farm as a tax-deductible expense. His leftist mistress travels round the world on his money. He likes to be seen as a country gentleman, but sexually he is a colonialist as we see when he picks up a coloured girl and takes her to an old mine property, only to be surprised by the mine guards.

The corpse of an unknown African is found on the farm, silently disputing Mehring's claim to his own clean soil. He identifies with the nameless black man under the reeds, burying him in a coffin. Yet the corpse haunting Mehring and his house (a symbol of South Africa) is the claim on Africa by those who possess no land at all.

The Conservationist is Gordimer's densest and most poetical novel. Its minute details and documentary precision form an intricate web of meanings where each stone, egg, and piece of marble carry symbolic implications. Here, as in *July's People*, Gordimer finds a fertile blend of narrative interest, rich language, and high moral seriousness, as well as rounded characters. She avoids explanations and leaves the reader free to interpret.

A Dialogue with the Future

Burger's Daughter (1979) is, in her own words, "a coded homage" to Bram Fischer, the communist lawyer who was sentenced to life in prison and whose name nobody was allowed to mention. Gordimer never claimed to portray him – although his daughter recognised their lives – but to convey the hidden truth behind a public person. The challenge to the writer is to penetrate official lies and facades, to see beyond and behind, with an intuition and insight unhampered by social conventions or family discretion. She intended, she said, "to bring to a broad canvas the position of the white Left in South Africa, and the extraordinary dynasty of belief and struggle in these families."

Two of her major works, *July's People* (1981) and *My Son's Story* (1990), deal, on several symbolic levels, with individual fates and the terrible choices forced upon people by an inhuman ideology. In the latter, Gordimer catches both the unexpected moment when the revolutionary spark ignites and the daily routine when internal dissension rocks the upper reaches of the anti-apartheid movement. The novel's central character, a mixed race man named Sonny, is trapped between being a teacher and a politician, a father and a husband. About to enter a political collective struggle, he is caught between one state and another to come; he is himself the transition. Through him, and others, Gordimer enters into a dialogue with the future, with the absent forces that are to rule our lives in years ahead.

Gordimer reveals situations when reality suddenly takes another course and we are caught in our roles and expectations, in the traps of skin colour, class, family, and the body itself. She is drawn to those who try to escape from the trap: What makes the suburban housewife become an underground agent, the lawyer to sacrifice his life for a future not his, the young architect to hide a black freedom fighter? How do faithfulness and betrayal interact in an erotic and political context?

July's People are Maureen and Bamford Smales, he an architect, she a housewife and former dancer, with three children, a nice suburban house, and a servant named July. It is a parable of the future: the servant hides his master's family to protect them from catastrophe. July has been their "boy" for fifteen years, and "his people" are his educated, good, white South African employers, as well as his own people, his black family and villagers deep in the country. In *July's People*, Gordimer portrays a future bloody South African revolution, which happily never took place. Instead there was the free election of 1994, the country narrowly drawing back from the brink of civil war.

Having stayed with Nadine Gordimer and her husband for several weeks at that time, I remember the joy, the laughter, and the hunger to see all and hear all of the miracles around us. "To have lived to see the end coming, and to have had some tiny part in it has been extraordinary and wonderful," she said in 1994. "It's like birth. As the baby's head is moulded by its passage down the birth canal so in South Africa your head, your mentality, your spirit, [are] forced into strange shapes by those extraordinary laws."

A Sport of Nature (1987) is Gordimer's most hazardous undertaking. Like *A Guest of Honour*, it is novel as history. Hillela runs off from an idyllic childhood to prove her sexuality and dive into the mess of the world's variety. Gordimer's empathy and affection are again with the blacks. It is a Cinderella tale summing up Africa's postcolonial history. Hillela is a despised daughter who enters palaces and presidencies through her political and sexual alliances. She marries an unscrupulous West African politician who becomes president of an African country and so attends the installation of the first South African black president (a thinly disguised Nelson Mandela). The finale is a vision of the future, but the focus is on Hillela as an honoured guest of a country where she was once a rebellious little white nobody. With Hillela, the intelligent, sensual heroine of a political picaresque, "Gordimer has met a fictional character she almost entirely loves," says her biographer Stephen Clingman. Gordimer took political and literary risks in this brutal fairy-tale of the dreadful year 1987, but she was right in predicting that liberation was only a few years away.

The Search for Identity

Nadine Gordimer's great themes are love and politics. Behind the most intimate relations, as well as the most public, there is the same search for an identity, a self-confirmation, and a wish to belong and exist. For Gordimer, the novel and the short story are instruments to penetrate a society that defends itself against scrutiny, hides in censorship and hypocrisy, refuses to recognise its history, and thus produces a grammar of lies where capitalism, liberalism, and Marxism mean the same thing: an onslaught on the *volk*. She enters people's most intimate regions to show how private life is violated by informers and race registers. To write from within the personal sphere and make it public is the contrary to the police method of crashing into houses to confiscate letters and diaries, an act the teenaged Gordimer herself witnessed when the police raided a servant's room in her family's house.

Nadine Gordimer with Morakabe Seakhoa (left) receiving an award from an association of African women (in the 1990s).

Her characters live in the shadow of violence, threatened by unpredictable brutality. Races and classes, conventions and codes ferment in a decoction of final showdowns and a mysteriously glimmering hope of unexpected mergers and elective affinities outlined in the sands of the future. Through her language and fearless characterisation, Gordimer became a counterweight to the regime's propaganda. Unsentimental and diagnostic, she reports from the heart of darkness.

In a country that for so long feared new thoughts and orientations, Gordimer has scraped away the many layers of prejudice and egoism; she has dug out the fragile roots of a common fate and made us glimpse the brilliant colours of a world untainted by apartheid.

Characters

Her novel *The House Gun* (1998) is a morally complex, moving story from the liberated South Africa. A white murderer may now be defended by a black lawyer; in fact, it is this highly educated black man on whom two intelligent, well-read parents depend for the survival and sanity of their souls and for the redefinition of meaning in their lives. Their son has killed a man he loves, out of jealousy. Natalie, the mistress who is the impetus for the murder, is self-destructive and rebels against every form of personal dependence. It is a fable of violence and the search for new forms of freedom; it is also courtroom reportage. Had not the house gun been around, as it generally is in white families, no murder would have happened. This, in turn, evokes reflection on the fact of the general rise of violence in the world. The gun bought like any commodity in many countries – in the United States, Great Britain, France, or Japan – serves domestic violence and often falls into the hands of a child, with tragic consequences.

Gordimer's style and perspective, more complex in the two latest novels, reflect on her words about the writer's dialectic: the tension between "excessive preoccupation and identification with the lives of others" and a "monstrous detachment." *The House Gun* has a definite voice of its own. Like *The Conservationist*, it stands stylistically apart from many of her other works. Who is the subject of this tragedy? Where are our edges? Where do the boundaries of self overlap, making each one responsible for the other's reality in a time of swift flux?

Gordimer is not afraid to present women of extraordinary intelligence and utmost delicacy of feeling as well as their vulgar counterparts. Take the human rights lawyer, Vera Stark, in *None to Accompany Me*. She is tormented by her husband Bennet's love, which remains the same without taking in what has happened around them. Vera wants someone who is committed to matters she thinks are important. She finds

in work a defiant independence, which earlier she has experienced in her erotic life. Her foremost responsibility is with the liberation struggle and with her own sense of self.

Becoming free, Vera locks herself out from most of what other people want their freedom for. In the end, she persuades herself that only without Bennet can she become a genuine human being. She suffers pangs of conscience because, in his uninvolved innocence, he cannot understand her rebellion. It is the solitariness – none to accompany me – in the midst of her community activism and her work for victims of persecution that is the paradox of Vera's life. She is looking for a combat-free zone on a battlefield. In her comradeship with those who are risking their lives, Vera gets closer to her black colleagues than she does to her husband.

Gordimer's strength, here and elsewhere, is that she confronts bold and dangerous questions and gives them form without offering a ready answer. How can one keep one's hands clean while working against a dirty regime that does not shrink from using any means at its disposal? Does freedom consist in losing the past bit by bit? Why is there always someone who cannot afford to remember and others who are incapable of forgetting, however much they want to?

Receiving the 'Premio Malaparte' from
Alberto Moravia in Capri, Italy, 1985.

The Truth of Fiction

Nadine Gordimer has never written an autobiography or produced testimonies. She works in the imaginative dimension, always on an expedition into the mysteries of human experience. She does not appear "armed and dangerous," as her friend Ronnie Kasrils, one-time terrorist, later cabinet minister, was described by the police as late as 1992; but, in fact, she is, for hardly anyone has so vividly alerted the world to how apartheid undermined relations between people and made innocence criminal.

"Nothing I say in essays and articles will be as true as my fiction," she stated in an interview in *Transition* (no. 56, 1992). Because fiction is a disguise, it can "encompass all the things that go unsaid among other people and in yourself… There is always, subconsciously, some kind of self-censorship in nonfiction." She added that, in a certain sense, a writer is selected by her subject, which is the consciousness of her own era.

Today, Nadine Gordimer lives and writes in a half-formed society of a kind almost never before seen on earth. Black and white have agreed to bring about a multiracial democracy by their faith as much as by their work. But the present stems from the past, and apartheid's contempt for human life now expresses itself in street killings, gang massacres, and armed robbery.

Gordimer's territory has always been the border between private emotions and external forces. There are no neutral zones where people can rest unobserved. In a land of lies, everyone lives a double life. Only love, the erotic dimension, stands for a sort of liberty, the glimpse of a more truthful existence. Outside the lovers' chamber, there is a society, greedy, immoral where empathy and responsibility for others, whatever skin colour, are rare. Thus, every meeting becomes instrumental or absurd. In many of her stories, Gordimer reminds us that the future of South Africa is not only a question of votes for all but one that requires immense effort to create a civil spirit, allowing people to look each other in the eye.

The responsibility of love and the loss of understanding, the loss of a grip on the world that comes with the end of love, are central themes in all of Gordimer's books. She is a moralist of a kind Alfred Nobel would have approved. She finds an uncommitted life not worth living. Her revolutionaries or human rights lawyers may have agonising personal problems, but they do not give up. In her later novels, there are people with energy and vision, as well as those who see nothing clearly – the former women, the latter often men. Gordimer seems to keep her characters at a distance in order to maintain a sense of the unknowable. Then one may discover, as André Brink says, "that one's very attempt at understanding or confronting the mystery opens up spaces of awareness one has not suspected before." Her true concerns reach beyond issues of the time to test the limits of human relationships and of language itself.

The Writer's Mission

Thanks to Nadine's and Reinhold's hospitality and our friendship of more than forty years, I have stayed in their house, built around 1910, longer than in anyone's house. It has hardly changed; I know every corner of it – her books, the paintings and the African handicraft she and Reinhold have collected over the years, the smells, the way to move in the kitchen and in the garden. The house is like the childhood retreat where I spent my summer holidays. A tree planted just before I visited the house for the first time is now huge. The police has never raided the house, although she has hidden some ANC fighters during a national alert for their seizure.

Per Wästberg (left), Reinhold Cassirer and Nadine Gordimer.

In her Nobel Lecture, Nadine Gordimer warned that an author risks both the state's condemnation as a traitor and the freedom movement's complaint that he or she fails to demonstrate blind loyalty. But, she explained, "the author serves humanity only as long as he utilises the word against his own loyalties too." Thus, a key paragraph in her book of Harvard lectures, *Writing and Being* (1994, p 130) is this:

Only through a writer's explorations could I have begun to discover the human dynamism of the place I was born to and the time it was to be enacted. Only in the prescient dimension of the imagination could I bring together what had been deliberately broken and fragmented; fit together the shapes of living experience, my own and that of others, without which a whole consciousness is not attainable. I had to be part of the transformation of my place in order for it to know me.

Nadine Gordimer's work has grown into a profoundly psychological and social chronicle of half a century in South Africa. She is both its archivist and lighthouse keeper. Above her collected experience, the light sweeps, illuminating parts that would otherwise have lain in darkness, helping us navigate towards a South Africa that, far from being geographically cut off and politically ostracised, depicts a universal landscape.

Every effort has been made by the editors to credit organizations and individuals with regard to the supply of photographs and illustrations. The publishers apologize for any omissions which will be corrected as soon as proper information has been given to us.

* **Per Wästberg** was born in Stockholm in 1933. He received his Bachelor of Arts (comparative literature) from Harvard University in 1955 and PhD from Uppsala University in 1962 on a thesis of the African novel, 1945-60. He has been a critic and columnist at Dagens Nyheter, Sweden's main daily, since 1953. 1976-82, he was Chief Editor of the same paper.

He is Vice President of International PEN, and was President of Swedish PEN, 1967-78. He founded the Swedish Amnesty in 1963. He is a member of the European Academy of Arts & Sciences since 1980 and became member of The Swedish Academy, chair no 12, in 1997. He is a member of the Nobel Committee for Literature since 1998.

Per Wästberg has published fifty books, novels, poetry and non-fiction. He made his debut as a 15-year old with a collection of short stories, *Boy with Soap Bubbles* (Pojke med såpbubblor) 1949. His breakthrough came in 1955 with the novel *Half of the Kingdom* (Halva kungariket).

His encounter with oppression and racism in Africa and the Third World is documented in *Forbidden Territory* (Förbjudet område), 1960, followed by *On the Black List* (På svarta listan), reportage, journal and political analysis on Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and South Africa. The books were printed in altogether one million copies in nine languages. It led to the author being prohibited from entering Rhodesia until its independence in 1980 and from South Africa until Nelson Mandela's release in 1990.

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Photo Gallery

Visit this web link to view all 12 photos

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1991/gordimer/photo-gallery/

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Press Release

Swedish Academy
The Permanent Secretary
Press release
October 3, 1991

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1991
Nadine Gordimer

"who through her magnificent epic writing has – in the words of Alfred Nobel – been of very great benefit to humanity"

The Swedish Academy has decided to award the Nobel Prize for Literature for 1991 to Nadine Gordimer. She is a South African, her mother English, her father Lithuanian. Her work comprises novels and short stories in which the consequences of apartheid form the central theme. She was born in 1923.

Gordimer writes with intense immediacy about the extremely complicated personal and social relationships in her environment. At the same time as she feels a political involvement – and takes action on that basis – she does not permit this to encroach on her writings. Nevertheless, her literary works, in giving profound insights into the historical process, help to shape this process.

A landmark in the first half of her career is the novel "A Guest of Honour" (1970). This is a close- textured and pregnant novel, classical in style. With great intensity she succeeds in conveying the complexity of events as a nation comes into existence. The returning former colonial administrator becomes involved in the conflicts and is torn by loyalties in several directions. The course of events is reflected in the parallel love affair of the protagonist. His adventitious, totally unheroic death gives rise to reflection on the role of the individual in the great game for the future.

Since the middle of the 70s Gordimer has developed a more complex technique in her novels. This phase of her writing has produced three masterpieces: "The Conservationist" (1974), "Burger's Daughter" (1979) and "July's People" (1981). Each in its own way illustrates conceivable personal standpoints in the complicated spiritual and material environment of an Africa in which black consciousness is growing. Gordimer takes the question of the justification of the privileges of white people – even benevolent white people – to its extreme.

Among these powerful novels "July's People" deserves particular mention. The events in Soweto form the background against which the novel is set. Confronted by armed rebellion, the Smales, a white family, flee with the help of July, their boy, to his own village, where they have to survive in a primitive, evacuated hut. As time goes by, the master-servant relationship is turned upside down by the family's increasing reliance on July. The ambiguity of the novel's title etches itself fast – July's people are the white family he still serves but also the members of his tribe. The description of the cultural and physical coarsening which the circumstances evoke is masterly. Communication between husband and wife dries up. He tries to articulate the new situation without the old phraseology, "but the words would not come". To refer to his wife, a pronoun is used: "Her". Not 'Maureen'. Not 'His wife'… The ones who find it easiest to adapt, both linguistically and socially, are the children. The author has her reasons for using the children's relationships to cast light on those of the adults in the novel.

Gordimer's latest book "My Son's Story" was published in 1990. Its subject is love in an insupportable society, the complications and obstacles inherent in the path to change. The relationship of the lovers is described with great tenderness. At the same time the unyielding political reality constantly intrudes. The twofold narrative perspective makes richly faceted description of the characters possible, its most surprising element being the heroism finally exhibited by the wife. The novel is ingenious and revealing and at the same time enthralling because of its poetic values.

The powerful novels should not make us forget the shorter works. Compact and dense, they are extremely telling and show Gordimer at the height of her creative powers. "Selected Stories" (1975) provides a survey. The fundamental themes are reworked successfully, as the title story in the collection "A Soldier's Embrace" (1980). Gordimer's specifically feminine experiences, her compassion and her outstanding literary style characterise her short stories as well.

Biobibliographical note

Nadine Gordimer was born on 20 November 1923 in Springs, a small mining town near Johannesburg in South Africa, of immigrant Jewish parents. Her father, a jeweller, came from Lithuania (then in Russia), her mother, from England. After being educated at a convent school, Nadine Gordimer studied at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. She has travelled extensively in Africa, Europe, and North America, where she has often undertaken lecture tours, but has continued to live in Johannesburg; married since 1954 to a businessman, Reinhold Cassirer. The couple have a son and each has a daughter from a previous marriage.

Nadine Gordimer began to write at the age of nine and her first short story was published in a South African magazine when she was only fifteen. Her first collection of short stories, *Face to Face*, was published ten years later in 1949. Her first novel, *The Lying Days*, appeared in 1953. She has now published 10 novels and 7 collections of short stories, as well as a few volumes of literary criticism and in addition, a large number of articles, speeches and lectures on different subjects. Some of her books have at times been banned in her native country.

Nadine Gordimer has always aspired to live as a private individual outside the public eye, but international fame and the many major awards which followed (among them the Booker Prize in 1974 for *The Conservationist*), honorary doctorates abroad (she has declined one in South Africa), various positions (she is, for example, Vice President of International P.E.N.), and her continual involvement on behalf of literature and free speech in a police state, where censorship and persecution of books and people exist, have made her "the doyenne of South African letters".

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Nobel Prize Lecture

Nobel Lecture, December 7, 1991

Writing and Being

In the beginning was the Word.

The Word was with God, signified God's Word, the word that was Creation. But over the centuries of human culture the word has taken on other meanings, secular as well as religious. To have the word has come to be synonymous with ultimate authority, with prestige, with awesome, sometimes dangerous persuasion, to have Prime Time, a TV talk show, to have the gift of the gab as well as that of speaking in tongues. The

word flies through space, it is bounced from satellites, now nearer than it has ever been to the heaven from which it was believed to have come. But its most significant transformation occurred for me and my kind long ago, when it was first scratched on a stone tablet or traced on papyrus, when it materialized from sound to spectacle, from being heard to being read as a series of signs, and then a script; and travelled through time from parchment to Gutenberg. For this is the genesis story of the writer. It is the story that **wrote** her or him into being.

It was, strangely, a double process, creating at the same time both the writer and the very purpose of the writer as a mutation in the agency of human culture. It was both ontogenesis as the origin and development of an individual being, and the adaptation, in the nature of that individual, specifically to the exploration of ontogenesis, the origin and development of **the** individual being. For we writers are evolved for that task. Like the prisoners incarcerated with the jaguar in Borges' story[1], 'The God's Script', who was trying to read, in a ray of light which fell only once a day, the meaning of being from the marking on the creature's pelt, we spend our lives attempting to interpret through the word the readings we take in the societies, the world of which we are part. It is in this sense, this inextricable, ineffable participation, that writing is always and at once an exploration of self and of the world; of individual and collective being.
Being here.

Humans, the only self-regarding animals, blessed or cursed with this torturing higher faculty, have always wanted to know why. And this is not just the great ontological question of why we are here at all, for which religions and philosophies have tried to answer conclusively for various peoples at various times, and science tentatively attempts dazzling bits of explanation we are perhaps going to die out in our millennia, like dinosaurs, without having developed the necessary comprehension to understand as a whole. Since humans became self-regarding they have sought, as well, explanations for the common phenomena of procreation, death, the cycle of seasons, the earth, sea, wind and stars, sun and moon, plenty and disaster. With myth, the writer's ancestors, the oral story-tellers, began to feel out and formulate these mysteries, using the elements of daily life – observable reality – and the faculty of the imagination – the power of projection into the hidden – to make stories.

Roland Barthes[2] asks, 'What is characteristic of myth?' And answers: 'To transform a meaning into form.' Myths are stories that mediate in this way between the known and unknown. Claude Levi-Strauss[3] wittily de-mythologizes myth as a genre between a fairy tale and a detective story. Being here; we don't know who-dun-it. But something satisfying, if not the answer, can be invented. Myth was the mystery plus the fantasy – gods, anthropomorphized animals and birds, chimera, phantasmagorical creatures – that posits out of the imagination some sort of explanation for the mystery. Humans and their fellow creatures were the materiality of the story, but as Nikos Kazantzakis once wrote, 'Art is the representation not of the body but of the forces which created the body.'

There are many proven explanations for natural phenomena now; and there are new questions of being arising out of some of the answers. For this reason, the genre of myth has never been entirely abandoned, although we are inclined to think of it as archaic. If it dwindled to the children's bedtime tale in some societies, in parts of the world protected by forests or deserts from international megaculture it has continued, alive, to offer art as a system of mediation between the individual and being. And it has made a whirling comeback out of Space, an Icarus in the avatar of Batman and his kind, who never fall into the ocean of failure to deal with the gravity forces of life. These new myths, however, do not seek so much to enlighten and provide some sort of answers as to distract, to provide a fantasy escape route for people who no longer want to face even the hazard of answers to the terrors of their existence. (Perhaps it is the positive knowledge that humans now possess the means to destroy their whole planet, the fear that they have in this way themselves become the gods, dreadfully charged with their own continued existence, that has made comic-book and movie myth escapist.) The forces of being remain. They are what the writer, as distinct from the contemporary popular mythmaker, still engage today, as myth in its ancient form attempted to do.

How writers have approached this engagement and continue to experiment with it has been and is, perhaps more than ever, the study of literary scholars. The writer in relation to the nature of perceivable reality and what is beyond – imperceivable reality – is the basis for all these studies, no matter what resulting concepts are labelled, and no matter in what categorized microfiles writers are stowed away for the annals of literary historiography. Reality is constructed out of many elements and entities, seen and unseen, expressed, and left unexpressed for breathing-space in the mind. Yet from what is regarded as old-hat psychological analysis to modernism and post-modernism, structuralism and poststructuralism, all literary studies are aimed at the same end: to pin down to a consistency (and what is consistency if not the principle hidden within the riddle?); to make definitive through methodology the writer's grasp at the forces of being. But life is aleatory in itself; being is constantly pulled and shaped this way and that by circumstances and different levels of consciousness. There is no pure state of being, and it follows that there is no pure text, 'real' text, totally incorporating the aleatory. It surely cannot be reached by any critical methodology, however interesting the attempt. To deconstruct a text is in a way a contradiction, since to deconstruct it is to make another construction out of the pieces, as Roland Barthes[5] does so fascinatingly, and admits to, in his linguistic and semantical dissection of Balzac's story, 'Sarrasine'. So the literary scholars end up being some kind of storyteller, too.

Perhaps there is no other way of reaching some understanding of being than through art? Writers themselves don't analyze what they do; to analyze would be to look down while crossing a canyon on a tightrope. To say this is not to mystify the process of writing but to make an image out of the intense inner concentration the writer must have to cross the chasms of the aleatory and make them the word's own, as an explorer plants a flag. Yeats' inner 'lonely impulse of delight' in the pilot's solitary flight, and his 'terrible beauty' born of mass uprising, both opposed and conjoined; E. M. Forster's modest 'only connect'; Joyce's chosen, wily 'silence, cunning and exile';

more contemporary, Gabriel García Márquez's labyrinth in which power over others, in the person of Simon Bolivar, is led to the thrall of the only unassailable power, death – these are some examples of the writer's endlessly varied ways of approaching the state of being through the word. Any writer of any worth at all hopes to play only a pocket-torch of light – and rarely, through genius, a sudden flambeau – into the bloody yet beautiful labyrinth of human experience, of being.

Anthony Burgess once gave a summary definition of literature as 'the aesthetic exploration of the world'. I would say that writing only begins there, for the exploration of much beyond, which nevertheless only aesthetic means can express.

How does the writer become one, having been given the word? I do not know if my own beginnings have any particular interest. No doubt they have much in common with those of others, have been described too often before as a result of this yearly assembly before which a writer stands. For myself, I have said that nothing factual that I write or say will be as truthful as my fiction. The life, the opinions, are not the work, for it is in the tension between standing apart and being involved that the imagination transforms both. Let me give some minimal account of myself. I am what I suppose would be called a natural writer. I did not make any decision to become one. I did not, at the beginning, expect to earn a living by being read. I wrote as a child out of the joy of apprehending life through my senses – the look and scent and feel of things; and soon out of the emotions that puzzled me or raged within me and which took form, found some enlightenment, solace and delight, shaped in the written word. There is a little Kafka[7] parable that goes like this; 'I have three dogs: Hold-him, Seize-him, and Nevermore. Hold-him and Seize-him are ordinary little Schipperkes and nobody would notice them if they were alone. But there is Nevermore, too. Nevermore is a mongrel Great Dane and has an appearance that centuries of the most careful breeding could never have produced. Nevermore is a gypsy.' In the small South African gold-mining town where I was growing up I was Nevermore the mongrel (although I could scarcely have been described as a Great Dane …) in whom the accepted characteristics of the townspeople could not be traced. I was the Gypsy, tinkering with words second-hand, mending my own efforts at writing by learning from what I read. For my school was the local library. Proust, Chekhov and Dostoevsky, to name only a few to whom I owe my existence as a writer, were my professors. In that period of my life, yes, I was evidence of the theory that books are made out of other books . . . But I did not remain so for long, nor do I believe any potential writer could.

With adolescence comes the first reaching out to otherness through the drive of sexuality. For most children, from then on the faculty of the imagination, manifest in play, is lost in the focus on day dreams of desire and love, but for those who are going to be artists of one kind or another the first life-crisis after that of birth does something else in addition: the imagination gains range and extends by the subjective flex of new and turbulent emotions. There are new perceptions. The writer begins to be able to enter into other lives. The process of standing apart and being involved has come.

Unknowingly, I had been addressing myself on the subject of being, whether, as in my first stories, there was a child's contemplation of death and murder in the necessity

to finish off, with a death blow, a dove mauled by a cat, or whether there was wondering dismay and early consciousness of racism that came of my walk to school, when on the way I passed storekeepers, themselves East European immigrants kept lowest in the ranks of the Anglo-Colonial social scale for whites in the mining town, roughly those whom colonial society ranked lowest of all, discounted as less than human – the black miners who were the stores' customers. Only many years later was I to realize that if I had been a child in that category – black – I might not have become a writer at all, since the library that made this possible for me was not open to any black child. For my formal schooling was sketchy, at best.

To address oneself to others begins a writer's next stage of development. To publish to anyone who would read what I wrote. That was my natural, innocent assumption of what publication meant, and it has not changed , that is what it means to me today, in spite of my awareness that most people refuse to believe that a writer does not have a particular audience in mind; and my other awareness: of the temptations, conscious and unconscious, which lure the writer into keeping a corner of the eye on who will take offense, who will approve what is on the page – a temptation that, like Eurydice's straying glance, will lead the writer back into the Shades of a destroyed talent.

The alternative is not the malediction of the ivory tower, another destroyer of creativity. Borges once said he wrote for his friends and to pass the time. I think this was an irritated flippant response to the crass question – often an accusation – 'For whom do you write?', just as Sartre's admonition that there are times when a writer should cease to write, and act upon being only in another way, was given in the frustration of an unresolved conflict between distress at injustice in the world and the knowledge that what he knew how to do best was write. Both Borges and Sartre, from their totally different extremes of denying literature a social purpose, were certainly perfectly aware that it has its implicit and unalterable social role in exploring the state of being, from which all other roles, personal among friends, public at the protest demonstration, derive. Borges was not writing for his friends, for he published and we all have received the bounty of his work. Sartre did not stop writing, although he stood at the barricades in 1968.

The question of for whom do we write nevertheless plagues the writer, a tin can attached to the tail of every work published. Principally it jangles the inference of tendentiousness as praise or denigration. In this context, Camus dealt with the question best. He said that he liked individuals who take sides more than literatures that do. 'One either serves the whole of man or does not serve him at all. And if man needs bread and justice, and if what has to be done must be done to serve this need, he also needs pure beauty which is the bread of his heart.' So Camus called for 'Courage in and talent in one's work.' And Márquez redefined tender fiction thus: The best way a writer can serve a revolution is to write as well as he can.

I believe that these two statements might be the credo for all of us who write. They do not resolve the conflicts that have come, and will continue to come, to contemporary writers. But they state plainly an honest possibility of doing so, they turn the face of the writer squarely to her and his existence, the reason to be, as a writer, and the reason to be, as a responsible human, acting, like any other, within a social context.

Being here: in a particular time and place. That is the existential position with particular implications for literature. Czeslaw Milosz once wrote the cry: 'What is poetry which does not serve nations or people?' and Brecht wrote of a time when 'to speak of trees is almost a crime'. Many of us have had such despairing thoughts while living and writing through such times, in such places, and Sartre's solution makes no sense in a world where writers were – and still are – censored and forbidden to write, where, far from abandoning the word, lives were and are at risk in smuggling it, on scraps of paper, out of prisons. The state of being whose ontogenesis we explore has overwhelmingly included such experiences. Our approaches, in Nikos Kazantzakis' words, have to 'make the decision which harmonizes with the fearsome rhythm of our time.'

Some of us have seen our books lie for years unread in our own countries, banned, and we have gone on writing. Many writers have been imprisoned. Looking at Africa alone – Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Jack Mapanje, in their countries, and in my own country, South Africa, Jeremy Cronin, Mongane Wally Serote, Breyten Breytenbach, Dennis Brutus, Jaki Seroke: all these went to prison for the courage shown in their lives, and have continued to take the right, as poets, to speak of trees. Many of the greats, from Thomas Mann to Chinua Achebe, cast out by political conflict and oppression in different countries, have endured the trauma of exile, from which some never recover as writers, and some do not survive at all. I think of the South Africans, Can Themba, Alex la Guma, Nat Nakasa, Todd Matshikiza. And some writers, over half a century from Joseph Roth to Milan Kundera, have had to publish new works first in the word that is not their own, a foreign language.

Then in 1988 the fearsome rhythm of our time quickened in an unprecedented frenzy to which the writer was summoned to submit the word. In the broad span of modern times since the Enlightenment writers have suffered opprobrium, bannings and even exile for other than political reasons. Flaubert dragged into court for indecency, over *Madame Bovary,* Strindberg arraigned for blasphemy, over *Marrying,* Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* banned – there have been many examples of so-called offense against hypocritical bourgeois mores, just as there have been of treason against political dictatorships. But in a period when it would be unheard of for countries such as France, Sweden and Britain to bring such charges against freedom of expression, there has risen a force that takes its appalling authority from something far more widespread than social mores, and far more powerful than the power of any single political regime. The edict of a world religion has sentenced a writer to death.

For more than three years, now, wherever he is hidden, wherever he might go, Salman Rushdie has existed under the Muslim pronouncement upon him of the **fatwa**. There is no asylum for him anywhere. Every morning when this writer sits down to write, he does not know if he will live through the day; he does not know whether the page will ever be filled. Salman Rushdie happens to be a brilliant writer, and the novel for which he is being pilloried, *The Satanic Verses,* is an innovative exploration of one of the most intense experiences of being in our era, the individual personality in transition between two cultures brought together in a post-colonial world. All is re-examined through the refraction of the imagination; the meaning of sexual and filial love, the rituals of social acceptance, the meaning of a formative religious faith for individuals removed from its subjectivity by circumstance opposing different systems of belief, religious and secular, in a different context of living. His novel is a true mythology. But although he has done for the postcolonial consciousness in Europe what Gunter Grass did for the post-Nazi one with *The Tin Drum* and *Dog Years,* perhaps even has tried to approach what Beckett did for our existential anguish in *Waiting For Godot,* the level of his achievement should not matter. Even if he were a mediocre writer, his situation is the terrible concern of every fellow writer for, apart from his personal plight, what implications, what new threat against the carrier of the word does it bring? It should be the concern of individuals and above all, of governments and human rights organizations all over the world. With dictatorships apparently vanquished, this murderous new dictate invoking the power of international terrorism in the name of a great and respected religion should and can be dealt with only by democratic governments and the United Nations as an offense against humanity.

I return from the horrific singular threat to those that have been general for writers of this century now in its final, summing-up decade. In repressive regimes anywhere – whether in what was the Soviet bloc, Latin America, Africa, China – most imprisoned writers have been shut away for their activities as citizens striving for liberation against the oppression of the general society to which they belong. Others have been condemned by repressive regimes for serving society by writing as well as they can; for this aesthetic venture of ours becomes subversive when the shameful secrets of our times are explored deeply, with the artist's rebellious integrity to the state of being manifest in life around her or him; then the writer's themes and characters inevitably are formed by the pressures and distortions of that society as the life of the fisherman is determined by the power of the sea.

There is a paradox. In retaining this integrity, the writer sometimes must risk both the state's indictment of treason, and the liberation forces' complaint of lack of blind commitment. As a human being, no writer can stoop to the lie of Manichean 'balance'. The devil always has lead in his shoes, when placed on his side of the scale. Yet, to paraphrase coarsely Márquez's dictum given by him both as a writer and a fighter for justice, the writer must take the right to explore, warts and all, both the enemy and the beloved comrade in arms, since only a try for the truth makes sense of being, only a try for the truth edges towards justice just ahead of Yeats's beast slouching to be born. In literature, from life,

we page through each other's faces
we read each looking eye
… It has taken lives to be able to do so.

These are the words of the South African poet and fighter for justice and peace in our country, Mongane Serote.

The writer is of service to humankind only insofar as the writer uses the word even against his or her own loyalties, trusts the state of being, as it is revealed, to hold somewhere in its complexity filaments of the cord of truth, able to be bound together, here and there, in art: trusts the state of being to yield somewhere fragmentary phrases of truth, which is the final word of words, never changed by our stumbling efforts to spell it out and write it down, never changed by lies, by semantic sophistry, by the dirtying of the word for the purposes of racism, sexism, prejudice, domination, the glorification of destruction, the curses and the praise-songs.

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1 . "The God's Script" from *Labyrinths & Other Writings* by Jorge Luis Borges. Translator unknown. Edited by Donald H. Yates & James E. Kirby. Penguin Modern Classics, page 71.

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2 . *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes. Translated by Annette Lavers. Hill & Wang, page 131.

3. *Historie de Lynx* by Claude Lévi-Strauss.'… je les situais à mi-chemin entre le conte de fé eest le roman policier'. Plon, page 13.
4. *Report to Greco* by Nikos Kazantzakis. Faber & Faber, page 150.
5. *S/Z* by Roland Barthes. Translated by Richard Miller. Jonathan Cape.
6. London *Observer* review. 19/4/81. Anthony Burgess.
7. The Third Octavo Notebook from *Wedding Preparations in the Country* by Franz Kafka. Definitive Edition. Secker & Warburg.
8. *Carnets* 1942-5 by Albert Camus.
9. Gabriel Gárcia Márquez. In an interview; my notes do not give the journal or date.
10. 'Dedication' from *Selected Poems* by Czeslaw Milosz. The Ecco Press.
11. "To Posterity' from *Selected Poems* by Bertolt Brecht. Translated by H. R. Hays. Grove Press, page 173.
12. *Report to Greco* by Nikos Kazantzakis. Faber & Faber.
13. *A Tough Tale* by Mongane Wally Serote. Kliptown Books.

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Honours and Awards

- W. H. Smith Commonwealth Literary Award for *Friday's Footprint* (1961)
- James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *A Guest of Honour* (1972)
- Booker Prize for *The Conservationist* (1974)

- Central News Agency Literary Award for *The Conservationist* (1974)
- Grand Aigle d'Or (France) (1975)
- Orange Prize shortlist; she declined
- Central News Agency Literary Award for *Burger's Daughter* (1979)
- Central News Agency Literary Award for *July's People* (1981)
- Scottish Arts Council Neil M. Gunn Fellowship (1981)
- Modern Language Association Honorary Fellow (1984)
- Rome Prize (1984)
- Premio Malaparte (Italy) (1985)
- Nelly Sachs Prize (Germany) (1985)
- Bennett Award (United States) (1987)
- Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for *A Sport of Nature* (1988)
- Inducted as an honorary member into Phi Beta Kappa (1988)
- Central News Agency Literary Award for *My Son's Story* (1990)
- Nobel Prize for Literature (1991)
- International Botev Prize Laureate (1996)
- Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Best Book from Africa for *The Pickup* (2002)
- Booker Prize longlist for *The Pickup* (2001)
- Officier of the Legion of Honour (2007)
- American Philosophical Society, Member (2008)
- American Academy of Arts and Letters, Honorary Member (1979)
- American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Honorary Member (1980)
- Royal Society of Literature, Fellow
- Congress of South African Writers, Patron
- Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, Commander
- 15 honorary degrees
- Senior Fellow, Massey College of the University of Toronto
- Golden Plate Award of the American Academy of Achievement presented by Awards Council member Archbishop Desmond Tutu at an awards ceremony at St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town, South Africa (2009)
- Order of the Aztec Eagle

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FILMS

In 1962, a Danish film adaptation of Gordimer's novel *A World of Strangers*, was released under the title *Dilemma* by Danish film director, Henning Carlsen, and starring Ivan Jackson, Evelyn Frank, and Marijke Mann. Gordimer co-wrote the screenplay with Carlsen. The film won the Grand prize at the 1962 Mannheim-Heidelberg International Filmfestival. In the U.K. this film was released under the title *A World of Strangers* due to an unrelated U.K. crime thriller being released in the same year under the same name.

In 1982, seven of her short stories were adapted as short films for television by West German television makers.[101] The stories included: "City Lovers"; "Six Feet of the Country"; "Country Lovers"; "Oral History"; "Praise"; "Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants" and "A Chip of Glass Ruby". Gordimer set conditions for the German producers, allowing her to hire the directors and screenwriters and that they be South African. The seven stories also had to be sold together to TV broadcasters with no cuts permitted. Barney Simon adapted Gordimer's "Six Feet of the Country" and directed "City Lovers". Gordimer wrote five screenplays herself.

"City Lovers" was presented at the New York Film Festival in 1982. All seven films were released as "The Gordimer Stories" at the Film Forum in New York City in 1983. Vincent Canby praised the films as "first rate" in *The New York Times*.[102] In the same newspaper, Joseph Lelyveld described the films as "honest and generally compelling reflection of Nadine Gordimer's South Africa, thanks to the artistic control she kept on the project."

The films were broadcast on American television by WNET in July 1985 as "The Nadine Gordimer Stories: Dramas of South Africa". Six of the seven films were filmed in South Africa, with "Oral History" filmed in Kenya. The films were not scheduled to be broadcast in South Africa.

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Videos

01] In Conversation with Nadine Gordimer | Writer & Social Activist

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxSpwG4H9aM [26:46]

Prasar Bharati Archives presents a series 'In Conversation with Rajiv Mehrotra'. The guest of honor is Nadine Gordimer writer and political activist who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991 and recognised as a writer "who through her magnificent epic writing has ... been of very great benefit to humanity".

02] 2022 Nadine Gordimer Lecture - The Vocabulary of Witnesses

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ufj-gQAUy8 [56:53]

Author and cultural activist Dr Mandla Langa delivered the prestigious lecture reflecting on Gordimer's work, a Nobel Laureate (Literature), and the choices of writers. Award-winning author Masande Ntshanga offered an insightful response to Langa's lecture.

03]Nadine Gordimer Lecture: The Audacity to Speak an Inconvenient Truth, by Professor Thuli Madonsela

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27a_UhqMseg [1:09:09]

04] Nadine Gordimer, Academy Class of 2009, Full Interview

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yw8C2wZu8YY [56:17]

05] 11th AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS' SYMPOSIUM - THE NADINE GORDIMER IN MEMORIAM LECTURE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3MwXET4Lb8 [1:24:40]

06] Ninety-Nine Novels: The Late Bourgeois World by Nadine Gordimer

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzOy5IkOH5k [50:48]

In 1984, Anthony Burgess published Ninety-Nine Novels, a selection of his favourite novels in English since 1939. The list is typically idiosyncratic, and shows the breadth of Burgess's interest in fiction. This podcast, by the International Anthony Burgess Foundation, explores the novels on Burgess's list with the help of writers, critics and other special guests.

In this episode, Graham Foster discovers Nadine Gordimer's 1966 novel The Late Bourgeois World, with guest Jeanne-Marie Jackson.

The Late Bourgeois World tells the story of Johannesburg suburbanite Liz Van Den Sandt, who finds out her ex-husband has committed suicide after betraying his comrades in the burgeoning rebellion against apartheid. Though she lives a privileged life with her new partner, she begins to feel drawn towards political action. When she is asked to help the Black Nationalist movement with their finances, she has to choose between her own safe but boring life and the exciting but risky act of rebellion. But does her ex-husband's failure prove the futility of political action?

Nadine Gordimer was born in the Transvaal region of South Africa in 1923. She moved to Johannesburg in 1948 and lived in the city for the rest of her life. She published her first novel, The Lying Days, in 1953 and went on to publish 14 more novels and over 20 books of short stories. Gordimer won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991. She died in 2014.

Jeanne-Marie Jackson is Professor of English at Johns Hopkins University. Her research focusses on African literature and intellectual history. Her first book, South African Literature's Russian Soul: Narrative Forms of Global Isolation was published by Bloomsbury in 2015. Her most recent book, The African Novel of Ideas: Philosophy and Individualism in the Age of Global Writing was published by Princeton University Press in 2021. She has written for the New York Times, New Left Review, and The Conversation, among others. Her latest book, as editor, is a critical edition of J.E. Casely Hayford's Ethiopia Unbound.

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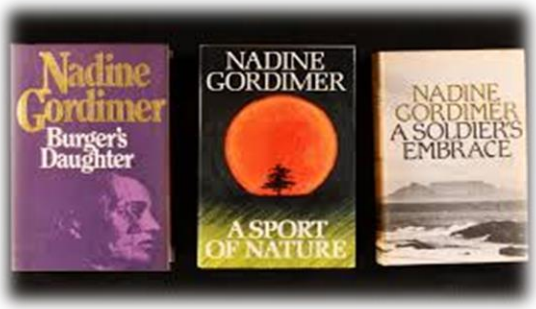

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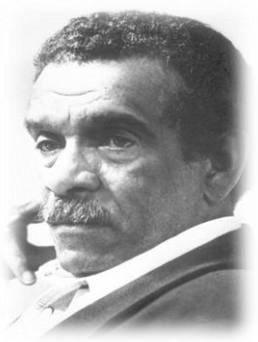

17 Mar 2017

Sir Derek Walcott

Nobel Prize in Literature 1992

Born: 23 January 1930, Castries, Saint Lucia
Died: 17 March 2017, Gros-Islet, Saint Lucia
Residence at the time of the award: Saint Lucia

Prize motivation:

"for a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity,
sustained by a historical vision,
the outcome of a multicultural commitment"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1992/walcott/facts/}

Links to other sites

[01] On Derek Walcott from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] On Derek Walcott from The Academy of American Poets

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Photo gallery

Kindly visit the Web Page to view 13 Photos
https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1992/walcott/photo-gallery/

Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Professor Kjell Espmark,
Member of the Swedish Academy

Translation from the Swedish text

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Trying to capture Derek Walcott's oceanic work in a formula would be an absurd enterprise – had he not himself come to our assistance, shrewdly hiding a few key formulations in his texts. His friend Joseph Brodsky lifts out one of them in his analysis of the work:

> I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
> I had a sound colonial education,
> I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
> and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.

These lines in *The Star-Apple Kingdom* call to mind, in the first place, how Walcott unites white and black on his father's as well as on his mother's side but they also remind us of the fact that in his poetry he amalgamates material from different cultures, West Indian, African, and European.

It does not, however, stop at the mingled voices of heritage or the union of themes from different parts of the world. In his introduction to the first volume of plays, we find another Walcott word of great validity – "the mulatto of style". Walcott's art arises from the crossing of two greatly differing traditions, the first a tradition he allowed himself to be adopted by, the European lineage from Homer via Dante, the Elizabethans, and Milton to Auden and Dylan Thomas, an elaborate tradition discernible in lavish metaphor and luxurious sound and rhythm, the second a domestic ageless tradition, an elementary language where, like a new Adam, the poet gives things their names, perceiving how the speech sounds take shape – as in a passage in the autobiographical *Another Life*: "I watched the vowels curl from the tongue of the carpenter's plane,/resinous, fragrant … "Derek Walcott's extraordinary idiom is born in the meeting between European virtuosity and the sensuality of the Caribbean Adam.

But this very personal combination includes not only themes and language. It is also a question of historical outlook. And here we are helped by yet another formula – "the New Aegean". The archipelago in focus is a reincarnation of the Aegean one: Greek antiquity finds a natural home in the Caribbean present. This can of course be most distinctly seen in Walcott's latest work, *Omeros*, his mosaic epic about the fisherman Achille and his ex-colleague the taxi driver Hector fighting for the favour of the fair housemaid Helen. But the Homeric pattern in this poem is not unique. In fact, *Omeros* has been emerging all through Walcott's production, appearing again and again in names and themes and continuously present in the Odyssean surging of the waves.

What carries the ancient murmur into today's Caribbean, what makes history present is the sea. "The Sea is History" – in a magnificent poem with that name, the sea can allow "the plangent harps of the Babylonian bondage" to sound in the West Indies, where slavery is still manifest in the memories of the skin.

Walcott's latest major poem abundantly exemplifies the combination of a vertiginous historical panorama and morning-fresh Caribbean now. But I should like to illustrate his art of capturing an enormous perspective of time in the tangible moment by means of a few lines in the previous volume, *The Arkansas Testament*. The associations of the poem's self-contemptuous ego at his shabby motel run to Saul on his way to Damascus:

> On the far side of the highway,
> a breeze turned the leaves of an aspen
> to the First Epistle of Paul's
> to the Corinthians.

This wind, which miraculously transforms the leaves of the tree into the pages with St. Paul's commandment of love, is more than an ingenious allusion to a moment where revelation changed history. The breeze pulling an age long since past into the now of the senses, captures, at the same time, a theme that has been sounding for a few decades in Derek Walcott's production – a Pauline empathy vigorous enough to cross centuries and continents.

Dear Derek Walcott,

In your last book, God allows one of your protagonists to be guided by a sea-swift across the ocean, back to his African origin. The quick divine movement of this pilot bird through space and time embodies the thrill given by your poetic art. As a great admirer of that art, I am happy to convey to you, on behalf of the Swedish Academy, the warmest congratulation on the Nobel Prize in Literature 1992 and to invite you to receive the Prize from the hands of His Majesty the King.

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Nobel Lecture, December 7, 1992

The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory

Felicity is a village in Trinidad on the edge of the Caroni plain, the wide central plain that still grows sugar and to which indentured cane cutters were brought after emancipation, so the small population of Felicity is East Indian, and on the afternoon that I visited it with friends from America, all the faces along its road were Indian, which, as I hope to show, was a moving, beautiful thing, because this Saturday afternoon *Ramleela,* the epic dramatization of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana,* was going to be performed, and the costumed actors from the village were assembling on a field strung with different-coloured flags, like a new gas station, and beautiful Indian boys in red and black were aiming arrows haphazardly into the afternoon light. Low blue mountains on the horizon, bright grass, clouds that would gather colour before the light went. Felicity! What a gentle Anglo-Saxon name for an epical memory.

Under an open shed on the edge of the field, there were two huge armatures of bamboo that looked like immense cages. They were parts of the body of a god, his calves or thighs, which, fitted and reared, would make a gigantic effigy. This effigy would be burnt as a conclusion to the epic. The cane structures flashed a predictable parallel: Shelley's sonnet on the fallen statue of Ozymandias and his empire, that "colossal wreck" in its empty desert.

Drummers had lit a fire in the shed and they eased the skins of their tables nearer the flames to tighten them. The saffron flames, the bright grass, and the hand-woven armatures of the fragmented god who would be burnt were not in any desert where imperial power had finally toppled but were part of a ritual, evergreen season that, like the cane-burning harvest, is annually repeated, the point of such sacrifice being its repetition, the point of the destruction being renewal through fire.

Deities were entering the field. What we generally call "Indian music" was blaring from the open platformed shed from which the epic would be narrated. Costumed actors were arriving. Princes and gods, I supposed. What an unfortunate confession! "Gods, I suppose" is the shrug that embodies our African and Asian diasporas. I had often thought of but never seen *Ramleela,* and had never seen this theatre, an open field, with village children as warriors, princes, and gods. I had no idea what the epic story was, who its hero was, what enemies he fought, yet I had recently adapted the *Odyssey* for a theatre in England, presuming that the audience knew the trials of Odysseus, hero of another Asia Minor epic, while nobody in Trinidad knew any more than I did about Rama, Kali, Shiva, Vishnu, apart from the Indians, a phrase I use pervertedly because that is the kind of remark you can still hear in Trinidad: "apart from the Indians".

It was as if, on the edge of the Central Plain, there was another plateau, a raft on which the *Ramayana* would be poorly performed in this ocean of cane, but that was my writer's view of things, and it is wrong. I was seeing the *Ramleela* at Felicity as theatre when it was faith.

Multiply that moment of self-conviction when an actor, made-up and costumed, nods to his mirror before stopping on stage in the belief that he is a reality entering an illusion and you would have what I presumed was happening to the actors of this epic. But they were not actors. They had been chosen; or they themselves had chosen their roles in this sacred story that would go on for nine afternoons over a two-hour period till the sun set. They were not amateurs but believers. There was no theatrical term to define them. They did not have to psych themselves up to play their roles. Their acting would probably be as buoyant and as natural as those bamboo arrows crisscrossing the afternoon pasture. They believed in what they were playing, in the sacredness of the text, the validity of India, while I, out of the writer's habit, searched for some sense of elegy, of loss, even of degenerative mimicry in the happy faces of the boy-warriors or the heraldic profiles of the village princes. I was polluting the afternoon with doubt and with the patronage of admiration. I misread the event through a visual echo of History – the cane fields, indenture, the evocation of vanished armies, temples, and trumpeting elephants – when all around me there was quite the opposite: elation, delight in the boys' screams, in the sweets-stalls, in more and more costumed characters appearing; a delight of conviction, not loss. The name Felicity made sense.

Consider the scale of Asia reduced to these fragments: the small white exclamations of minarets or the stone balls of temples in the cane fields, and one can understand the self-mockery and embarrassment of those who see these rites as parodic, even degenerate. These purists look on such ceremonies as grammarians look at a dialect, as cities look on provinces and empires on their colonies. Memory that yearns to join the centre, a limb remembering the body from which it has been severed, like those bamboo thighs of the god. In other words, the way that the Caribbean is still looked at, illegitimate, rootless, mongrelized. "No people there", to quote Froude, "in the true sense of the word". No people. Fragments and echoes of real people, unoriginal and broken.

The performance was like a dialect, a branch of its original language, an abridgement of it, but not a distortion or even a reduction of its epic scale. Here in Trinidad I had discovered that one of the greatest epics of the world was seasonally performed, not with that desperate resignation of preserving a culture, but with an openness of belief that was as steady as the wind bending the cane lances of the Caroni plain. We had to leave before the play began to go through the creeks of the Caroni Swamp, to catch the scarlet ibises coming home at dusk. In a performance as natural as those of the actors of the *Ramleela,* we watched the flocks come in as bright as the scarlet of the boy archers, as the red flags, and cover an islet until it turned into a flowering tree, an anchored immortelle. The sigh of History meant nothing here. These two visions, the *Ramleela* and the arrowing flocks of scarlet ibises, blent into a single gasp of gratitude. Visual surprise is natural in the Caribbean; it comes with the landscape, and faced with its beauty, the sigh of History dissolves.

We make too much of that long groan which underlines the past. I felt privileged to discover the ibises as well as the scarlet archers of Felicity.

The sigh of History rises over ruins, not over landscapes, and in the Antilles there are few ruins to sigh over, apart from the ruins of sugar estates and abandoned forts. Looking around slowly, as a camera would, taking in the low blue hills over Port of Spain, the village road and houses, the warrior-archers, the god-actors and their handlers, and music already on the sound track, I wanted to make a film that would be a long-drawn sigh over Felicity. I was filtering the afternoon with evocations of a lost

India, but why “evocations”? Why not “celebrations of a real presence”? Why should India be “lost” when none of these villagers ever really knew it, and why not “continuing”, why not the perpetuation of joy in Felicity and in all the other nouns of the Central Plain: Couva, Chaguanas, Charley Village? Why was I not letting my pleasure open its windows wide? I was enticed like any Trinidadian to the ecstasies of their claim, because ecstasy was the pitch of the sinuous drumming in the loudspeakers. I was entitled to the feast of Husein, to the mirrors and crepe-paper temples of the Muslim epic, to the Chinese Dragon Dance, to the rites of that Sephardic Jewish synagogue that was once on Something Street. I am only one-eighth the writer I might have been had I contained all the fragmented languages of Trinidad.

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.

And this is the exact process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its “making” but its remaking, the fragmented memory, the armature that frames the god, even the rite that surrenders it to a final pyre; the god assembled cane by cane, reed by weaving reed, line by plaited line, as the artisans of Felicity would erect his holy echo.

Poetry, which is perfection’s sweat but which must seem as fresh as the raindrops on a statue’s brow, combines the natural and the marmoreal; it conjugates both tenses simultaneously: the past and the present, if the past is the sculpture and the present the beads of dew or rain on the forehead of the past. There is the buried language and there is the individual vocabulary, and the process of poetry is one of excavation and of self-discovery. Tonally the individual voice is a dialect; it shapes its own accent, its own vocabulary and melody in defiance of an imperial concept of language, the language of Ozymandias, libraries and dictionaries, law courts and critics, and churches, universities, political dogma, the diction of institutions. Poetry is an island that breaks away from the main. The dialects of my archipelago seem as fresh to me as those raindrops on the statue’s forehead, not the sweat made from the classic exertion of frowning marble, but the condensations of a refreshing element, rain and salt.

Deprived of their original language, the captured and indentured tribes create their own, accreting and secreting fragments of an old, an epic vocabulary, from Asia and from Africa, but to an ancestral, an ecstatic rhythm in the blood that cannot be subdued by slavery or indenture, while nouns are renamed and the given names of places accepted like Felicity village or Choiseul. The original language dissolves from the exhaustion of distance like fog trying to cross an ocean, but this process of renaming, of finding new metaphors, is the same process that the poet faces every morning of his working day, making his own tools like Crusoe, assembling nouns from necessity, from Felicity, even renaming himself. The stripped man is driven back to that self-astonishing, elemental force, his mind. That is the basis of the Antillean experience, this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these shards of a huge tribal vocabulary,

these partially remembered customs, and they are not decayed but strong. They survived the Middle Passage and the *Fatel Rozack,* the ship that carried the first indentured Indians from the port of Madras to the cane fields of Felicity, that carried the chained Cromwellian convict and the Sephardic Jew, the Chinese grocer and the Lebanese merchant selling cloth samples on his bicycle.

And here they are, all in a single Caribbean city, Port of Spain, the sum of history, Trollope's "non-people". A downtown babel of shop signs and streets, mongrelized, polyglot, a ferment without a history, like heaven. Because that is what such a city is, in the New World, a writer's heaven.

A culture, we all know, is made by its cities.

Another first morning home, impatient for the sunrise – a broken sleep. Darkness at five, and the drapes not worth opening; then, in the sudden light, a cream-walled, brown-roofed police station bordered with short royal palms, in the colonial style, back of it frothing trees and taller palms, a pigeon fluttering into the cover of an cave, a rain-stained block of once-modern apartments, the morning side road into the station without traffic. All part of a surprising peace. This quiet happens with every visit to a city that has deepened itself in me. The flowers and the hills are easy, affection for them predictable; it is the architecture that, for the first morning, disorients. A return from American seductions used to make the traveller feel that something was missing, something was trying to complete itself, like the stained concrete apartments. Pan left along the window and the excrescences rear – a city trying to soar, trying to be brutal, like an American city in silhouette, stamped from the same mould as Columbus or Des Moines. An assertion of power, its decor bland, its air conditioning pitched to the point where its secretarial and executive staff sport competing cardigans; the colder the offices the more important, an imitation of another climate. A longing, even an envy of feeling cold.

In serious cities, in grey, militant winter with its short afternoons, the days seem to pass by in buttoned overcoats, every building appears as a barracks with lights on in its windows, and when snow comes, one has the illusion of living in a Russian novel, in the nineteenth century, because of the literature of winter. So visitors to the Caribbean must feel that they are inhabiting a succession of postcards. Both climates are shaped by what we have read of them. For tourists, the sunshine cannot be serious. Winter adds depth and darkness to life as well as to literature, and in the unending summer of the tropics not even poverty or poetry (in the Antilles poverty is poetry with a V, *une vie,* a condition of life as well as of imagination) seems capable of being profound because the nature around it is so exultant, so resolutely ecstatic, like its music. A culture based on joy is bound to be shallow. Sadly, to sell itself, the Caribbean encourages the delights of mindlessness, of brilliant vacuity, as a place to flee not only winter but that seriousness that comes only out of culture with four seasons. So how can there be a people there, in the true sense of the word?

They know nothing about seasons in which leaves let go of the year, in which spires fade in blizzards and streets whiten, of the erasures of whole cities by fog, of reflection in fireplaces; instead, they inhabit a geography whose rhythm, like their music, is limited to two stresses: hot and wet, sun and rain, light and shadow, day and night, the limitations of an incomplete metre, and are therefore a people incapable of the subtleties of contradiction, of imaginative complexity. So be it. We cannot change contempt.

Ours are not cities in the accepted sense, but no one wants them to be. They dictate their own proportions, their own definitions in particular places and in a prose equal to that of their detractors, so that now it is not just St. James but the streets and yards that Naipaul commemorates, its lanes as short and brilliant as his sentences; not just the noise and jostle of Tunapuna but the origins of C.L.R. *James's Beyond a Boundary,* not just Felicity village on the Caroni plain, but Selvon Country, and that is the way it goes up the islands now: the old Dominica of Jean Rhys still very much the way she wrote of it; and the Martinique of the early Cesaire; Perse's Guadeloupe, even without the pith helmets and the mules; and what delight and privilege there was in watching a literature – one literature in several imperial languages, French, English, Spanish – bud and open island after island in the early morning of a culture, not timid, not derivative, any more than the hard white petals of the frangipani are derivative and timid. This is not a belligerent boast but a simple celebration of inevitability: that this flowering had to come.

On a heat-stoned afternoon in Port of Spain, some alley white with glare, with love vine spilling over a fence, palms and a hazed mountain appear around a corner to the evocation of Vaughn or Herbert's "that shady city of palm-trees", or to the memory of a Hammond organ from a wooden chapel in Castries, where the congregation sang "Jerusalem, the Golden". It is hard for me to see such emptiness as desolation. It is that patience that is the width of Antillean life, and the secret is not to ask the wrong thing of it, not to demand of it an ambition it has no interest in. The traveller reads this as lethargy, as torpor.

Here there are not enough books, one says, no theatres, no museums, simply not enough to do. Yet, deprived of books, a man must fall back on thought, and out of thought, if he can learn to order it, will come the urge to record, and in extremity, if he has no means of recording, recitation, the ordering of memory which leads to metre, to commemoration. There can be virtues in deprivation, and certainly one virtue is salvation from a cascade of high mediocrity, since books are now not so much created as remade. Cities create a culture, and all we have are these magnified market towns, so what are the proportions of the ideal Caribbean city? A surrounding, accessible countryside with leafy suburbs, and if the city is lucky, behind it, spacious plains. Behind it, fine mountains; before it, an indigo sea. Spires would pin its centre and around them would be leafy, shadowy parks. Pigeons would cross its sky in alphabetic patterns, carrying with them memories of a belief in augury, and at the heart of the city there would be horses, yes, horses, those animals last seen at the end of the nineteenth century drawing broughams and carriages with top-hatted citizens, horses that live in the present tense without elegiac echoes from their hooves, emerging from paddocks at the Queen's Park Savannah at sunrise, when mist is unthreading from the cool mountains above the roofs, and at the centre of the city seasonally there would be races, so that citizens could roar at the speed and grace of these nineteenth-century animals. Its docks, not obscured by smoke or deafened by too. much machinery, and above all, it would be so racially various that the cultures of the world – the Asiatic, the Mediterranean, the European, the African – would be represented in it, its humane variety more exciting than Joyce's Dublin. Its citizens would intermarry as they chose, from instinct, not tradition, until their children find it increasingly futile to trace their genealogy. It would not have too many avenues difficult or dangerous for pedestrians, its mercantile area would be a cacophony of accents, fragments of the old language that would be silenced immediately at five o'clock, its docks resolutely vacant on Sundays.

This is Port of Spain to me, a city ideal in its commercial and human proportions, where a citizen is a walker and not a pedestrian, and this is how Athens may have been before it became a cultural echo.

The finest silhouettes of Port of Spain are idealizations of the craftsman's handiwork, not of concrete and glass, but of baroque woodwork, each fantasy looking more like an involved drawing of itself than the actual building. Behind the city is the Caroni plain, with its villages, Indian prayer flags, and fruit vendors' stalls along the highway over which ibises come like floating flags. Photogenic poverty! Postcard sadnesses! I am not re-creating Eden; I mean, by "the Antilles", the reality of light, of work, of survival. I mean a house on the side of a country road, I mean the Caribbean Sea, whose smell is the smell of refreshing possibility as well as survival. Survival is the triumph of stubborness, and spiritual stubborness, a sublime stupidity, is what makes the occupation of poetry endure, when there are so many things that should make it futile. Those things added together can go under one collective noun: "the world".

This is the visible poetry of the Antilles, then. Survival.

If you wish to understand that consoling pity with which the islands were regarded, look at the tinted engravings of Antillean forests, with their proper palm trees, ferns, and waterfalls. They have a civilizing decency, like Botanical Gardens, as if the sky were a glass ceiling under which a colonized vegetation is arranged for quiet walks and carriage rides. Those views are incised with a pathos that guides the engraver's tool and the topographer's pencil, and it is this pathos which, tenderly ironic, gave villages names like Felicity. A century looked at a landscape furious with vegetation in the wrong light and with the wrong eye. It is such pictures that are saddening rather than the tropics itself. These delicate engravings of sugar mills and harbours, of native women in costume, are seen as a part of History, that History which looked over the shoulder of the engraver and, later, the photographer. History can alter the eye and the moving hand to conform a view of itself; it can rename places for the nostalgia in an echo; it can temper the glare of tropical light to elegiac monotony in prose, the tone of judgement in Conrad, in the travel journals of Trollope.

These travellers carried with them the infection of their own malaise, and their prose reduced even the landscape to melancholia and self-contempt. Every endeavor is belittled as imitation, from architecture to music. There was this conviction in Froude that since History is based on achievement, and since the history of the Antilles was so genetically corrupt, so depressing in its cycles of massacres, slavery, and indenture, a culture was inconceivable and nothing could ever be created in those ramshackle ports, those monotonously feudal sugar estates. Not only the light and salt of Antillean mountains defied this, but the demotic vigour and variety of their inhabitants. Stand close to a waterfall and you will stop hearing its roar. To be still in the nineteenth century, like horses, as Brodsky has written, may not be such a bad deal, and much of our life in the Antilles still seems to be in the rhythm of the last century, like the West Indian novel.

By writers even as refreshing as Graham Greene, the Caribbean is looked at with elegiac pathos, a prolonged sadness to which Levi-Strauss has supplied an epigraph: *Tristes Tropiques.* Their *tristesse* derives from an attitude to the Caribbean dusk, to rain, to uncontrollable vegetation, to the provincial ambition of Caribbean cities where brutal replicas of modern architecture dwarf the small houses and streets. The mood is understandable, the melancholy as contagious as the fever of a sunset, like

the gold fronds of diseased coconut palms, but there is something alien and ultimately wrong in the way such a sadness, even a morbidity, is described by English, French, or some of our exiled writers. It relates to a misunderstanding of the light and the people on whom the light falls.

These writers describe the ambitions of our unfinished cities, their unrealized, homiletic conclusion, but the Caribbean city may conclude just at that point where it is satisfied with its own scale, just as Caribbean culture is not evolving but already shaped. Its proportions are not to be measured by the traveller or the exile, but by its own citizenry and architecture. To be told you are not yet a city or a culture requires this response. I am not your city or your culture. There might be less of *Tristes Tropiques* after that. Here, on the raft of this dais, there is the sound of the applauding surf: our landscape, our history recognized, “at last”. *At Last* is one of the first Caribbean books. It was written by the Victorian traveller Charles Kingsley. It is one of the early books to admit the Antillean landscape and its figures into English literature. I have never read it but gather that its tone is benign. The Antillean archipelago was there to be written about, not to write itself, by Trollope, by Patrick Leigh-Fermor, in the very tone in which I almost wrote about the village spectacle at Felicity, as a compassionate and beguiled outsider, distancing myself from Felicity village even while I was enjoying it. What is hidden cannot be loved. The traveller cannot love, since love is stasis and travel is motion. If he returns to what he loved in a landscape and stays there, he is no longer a traveller but in stasis and concentration, the lover of that particular part of earth, a native. So many people say they “love the Caribbean”, meaning that someday they plan to return for a visit but could never live there, the usual benign insult of the traveller, the tourist. These travellers, at their kindest, were devoted to the same patronage, the islands passing in profile, their vegetal luxury, their backwardness and poverty. Victorian prose dignified them. They passed by in beautiful profiles and were forgotten, like a vacation.

Alexis Saint-Leger Leger, whose writer’s name is Saint-John Perse, was the first Antillean to win this prize for poetry. He was born in Guadeloupe and wrote in French, but before him, there was nothing as fresh and clear in feeling as those poems of his childhood, that of a privileged white child on an Antillean plantation, *Pour Feter une Enfance, Eloges,* and later *Images a Crusoe.* At last, the first breeze on the page, salt-edged and self-renewing as the trade winds, the sound of pages and palm trees turning as “the odour of coffee ascents the stairs”.

Caribbean genius is condemned to contradict itself. To celebrate Perse, we might be told, is to celebrate the old plantation system, to celebrate the beque or plantation rider, verandahs and mulatto servants, a white French language in a white pith helmet, to celebrate a rhetoric of patronage and hauteur; and even if Perse denied his origins, great writers often have this folly of trying to smother their source, we cannot deny him any more than we can the African Aime Cesaire. This is not accommodation, this is the ironic republic that is poetry, since, when I see cabbage palms moving their fronds at sunrise, I think they are reciting Perse.

The fragrant and privileged poetry that Perse composed to celebrate his white childhood and the recorded Indian music behind the brown young archers of Felicity, with the same cabbage palms against the same Antillean sky, pierce me equally. I feel the same poignancy of pride in the poems as in the faces. Why, given the history of the Antilles, should this be remarkable? The history of the world, by which of course we mean Europe, is a record of intertribal lacerations, of ethnic cleansings. At last, islands not written about but writing themselves! The palms and the Muslim minarets are Antillean exclamations. At last! the royal palms of Guadeloupe recite *Éloges* by heart.

Later, in *"Anabase",* Perse assembled fragments of an imaginary epic, with the clicking teeth of frontier gates, barren wadis with the froth of poisonous lakes, horsemen burnoosed in sandstorms, the opposite of cool Caribbean mornings, yet not necessarily a contrast any more than some young brown archer at Felicity, hearing the sacred text blared across the flagged field, with its battles and elephants and monkey-gods, in a contrast to the white child in Guadeloupe assembling fragments of his own epic from the lances of the cane fields, the estate carts and oxens, and the calligraphy of bamboo leaves from the ancient languages, Hindi, Chinese, and Arabic, on the Antillean sky. From the *Ramayana* to Anabasis, from Guadeloupe to Trinidad, all that archaeology of fragments lying around, from the broken African kingdoms, from the crevasses of Canton, from Syria and Lebanon, vibrating not under the earth but in our raucous, demotic streets.

A boy with weak eyes skims a flat stone across the flat water of an Aegean inlet, and that ordinary action with the scything elbow contains the skipping lines of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* and another child aims a bamboo arrow at a village festival, another hears the rustling march of cabbage palms in a Caribbean sunrise, and from that sound, with its fragments of tribal myth, the compact expedition of Perse's epic is launched, centuries and archipelagoes apart. For every poet it is always morning in the world. History a forgotten, insomniac night; History and elemental awe are always our early beginning, because the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History.

There is a force of exultation, a celebration of luck, when a writer finds himself a witness to the early morning of a culture that is defining itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf, in that self-defining dawn, which is why, especially at the edge of the sea, it is good to make a ritual of the sunrise. Then the noun, the "Antilles" ripples like brightening water, and the sounds of leaves, palm fronds, and birds are the sounds of a fresh dialect, the native tongue. The personal vocabulary, the individual melody whose metre is one's biography, joins in that sound, with any luck, and the body moves like a walking, a waking island.

This is the benediction that is celebrated, a fresh language and a fresh people, and this is the frightening duty owed.

I stand here in their name, if not their image – but also in the name of the dialect they exchange like the leaves of the trees whose names are suppler, greener, more morning-stirred than English – *laurier canelles, bois-flot, bois-canot* – or the valleys the trees mention – *Fond St. Jacques, Matoonya, Forestier, Roseau, Mahaut* – or the empty beaches – *L'Anse Ivrogne, Case en Bas, Paradis* – all songs and histories in themselves, pronounced not in French – but in patois.
One rose hearing two languages, one of the trees, one of school children reciting in English:

I am monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute;
From the centre all round to the sea
I am lord of the fowl and the brute.
Oh, solitude! where are the charms
That sages have seen in thy face?

Better dwell in the midst of alarms,
Than reign in this horrible place …

While in the country to the same metre, but to organic instruments, handmade violin, chac-chac, and goatskin drum, a girl named Sensenne singing:

Si mwen di 'ous ça fait mwen la peine
'Ous kai dire ça vrai.
(If I told you that caused me pain
You'll say, "It's true".)
Si mwen di 'ous ça pentetrait mwen
'Ous peut dire ça vrai
(If I told you you pierced my heart
You'd say, "It's true".)
Ces mamailles actuellement
Pas ka faire l 'amour z'autres pour un rien.
(Children nowadays
Don't make love for nothing.)

It is not that History is obliterated by this sunrise. It is there in Antillean geography, in the vegetation itself. The sea sighs with the drowned from the Middle Passage, the butchery of its aborigines, Carib and Aruac and Taino, bleeds in the scarlet of the immortelle, and even the actions of surf on sand cannot erase the African memory, or the lances of cane as a green prison where indentured Asians, the ancestors of Felicity, are still serving time.

That is what I have read around me from boyhood, from the beginnings of poetry, the grace of effort. In the hard mahogany of woodcutters: faces, resinous men, charcoal burners; in a man with a cutlass cradled across his forearm, who stands on the verge with the usual anonymous khaki dog; in the extra clothes he put on this morning, when it was cold when he rose in the thinning dark to go and make his garden in the heights – the heights, the garden, being miles away from his house, but that is where he has his land – not to mention the fishermen, the footmen on trucks, groaning up mornes, all fragments of Africa originally but shaped and hardened and rooted now in the island's life, illiterate in the way leaves are illiterate; they do not read, they are there to be read, and if they are properly read, they create their own literature.

But in our tourist brochures the Caribbean is a blue pool into which the republic dangles the extended foot of Florida as inflated rubber islands bob and drinks with umbrellas float towards her on a raft. This is how the islands from the shame of necessity sell themselves; this is the seasonal erosion of their identity, that high-pitched repetition of the same images of service that cannot distinguish one island from the other, with a future of polluted marinas, land deals negotiated by ministers, and all of this conducted to the music of Happy Hour and the rictus of a smile. What is the earthly paradise for our visitors? Two weeks without rain and a mahogany tan, and, at sunset, local troubadours in straw hats and floral shirts beating "Yellow Bird" and "Banana Boat Song" to death. There is a territory wider than this – wider than the limits made by the map of an island – which is the illimitable sea and what it remembers.

All of the Antilles, every island, is an effort of memory; every mind, every racial biography culminating in amnesia and fog. Pieces of sunlight through the fog and

sudden rainbows, *arcs-en-ciel.* That is the effort, the labour of the Antillean imagination, rebuilding its gods from bamboo frames, phrase by phrase.
Decimation from the Aruac downwards is the blasted root of Antillean history, and the benign blight that is tourism can infect all of those island nations, not gradually, but with imperceptible speed, until each rock is whitened by the guano of white-winged hotels, the arc and descent of progress.

Before it is all gone, before only a few valleys are left, pockets of an older life, before development turns every artist into an anthropologist or folklorist, there are still cherishable places, little valleys that do not echo with ideas, a simplicity of rebeginnings, not yet corrupted by the dangers of change. Not nostalgic sites but occluded sanctities as common and simple as their sunlight. Places as threatened by this prose as a headland is by the bulldozer or a sea almond grove by the surveyor's string, or from blight, the mountain laurel.

One last epiphany: A basic stone church in a thick valley outside Soufrière, the hills almost shoving the houses around into a brown river, a sunlight that looks oily on the leaves, a backward place, unimportant, and one now being corrupted into significance by this prose. The idea is not to hallow or invest the place with anything, not even memory. African children in Sunday frocks come down the ordinary concrete steps into the church, banana leaves hang and glisten, a truck is parked in a yard, and old women totter towards the entrance. Here is where a real fresco should be painted, one without importance, but one with real faith, mapless, Historyless.

How quickly it could all disappear! And how it is beginning to drive us further into where we hope are impenetrable places, green secrets at the end of bad roads, headlands where the next view is not of a hotel but of some long beach without a figure and the hanging question of some fisherman's smoke at its far end. The Caribbean is not an idyll, not to its natives. They draw their working strength from it organically, like trees, like the sea almond or the spice laurel of the heights. Its peasantry and its fishermen are not there to be loved or even photographed; they are trees who sweat, and whose bark is filmed with salt, but every day on some island, rootless trees in suits are signing favourable tax breaks with entrepreneurs, poisoning the sea almond and the spice laurel of the mountains to their roots. A morning could come in which governments might ask what happened not merely to the forests and the bays but to a whole people.

They are here again, they recur, the faces, corruptible angels, smooth black skins and white eyes huge with an alarming joy, like those of the Asian children of Felicity at *Ramleela;* two different religions, two different continents, both filling the heart with the pain that is joy.

But what is joy without fear? The fear of selfishness that, here on this podium with the world paying attention not to them but to me, I should like to keep these simple joys inviolate, not because they are innocent, but because they are true. They are as true as when, in the grace of this gift, Perse heard the fragments of his own epic of Asia Minor in the rustling of cabbage palms, that inner Asia of the soul through which imagination wanders, if there is such a thing as imagination as opposed to the collective memory of our entire race, as true as the delight of that warrior-child who flew a bamboo arrow over the flags in the field at Felicity; and now as grateful a joy and a blessed fear as when a boy opened an exercise book and, within the discipline of its margins, framed stanzas that might contain the light of the hills on an island blest by obscurity, cherishing our insignificance.

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Banquet speech

Derek Walcott's speech at the Nobel Banquet, December 10, 1992

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Distinguished Representatives of the Nobel Foundation, Honourable Members of the Academies, the Karolinska Institute and Election Committees, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The honour that you pay me is accepted in the one name that comprises all of the supposedly broken languages of the Caribbean. They cohere in this moment, a moment that recognises their endeavour and one which I receive with pride and humility on their behalf. Pride in the continuing struggle of Antillean writers, humility in the glare of representing them by my own evanescent image.

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Interview

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1992/walcott/interview/

Interview with the 1992 Nobel Laureate in Literature,
Derek Walcott, by freelance journalist
Simon Stanford, 28 April 2005. [35:29]

Derek Walcott talks about his Caribbean background; his early vocation to become a poet (6:17); what audience he writes for (12:58); influences from the Caribbean culture (17:12); the commercialisation of culture (24:14); what inspired him to write Omeros (27:19); being awarded the Nobel Prize, (29:40); and gives advice to young student (32:42).

Read the interview

Interview, November 2000 [44:10]
From his home in New York, Derek Walcott talks about his life and work with Anders Hallengren one day in November 2000. We can also hear him read some lines from his works "The Muse of History" and "Origins."

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Poetry

The 1992 Nobel Laureate in Literature Derek Walcott reads his poem
'Sea Grapes' from "Collected Poems 1948-1984".
The video was recorded at Harvard University in April, 2005.

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1992/walcott/poetry/

Two poems by Derek Walcott

Sea Grapes

That sail which leans on light,
tired of islands,
a schooner beating up the Caribbean

for home, could be Odysseus,
home-bound on the Aegean;
that father and husband's

longing, under gnarled sour grapes, is like
the adulterer hearing Nausicaa's name in
every gull's outcry.

This brings nobody peace. The ancient war
between obsession and responsibility will
never finish and has been the same

for the sea-wanderer or the one on shore now
wriggling on his sandals to walk home, since
Troy sighed its last flame,

and the blind giant's boulder heaved the trough from
whose groundswell the great hexameters come to the
conclusions of exhausted surf.

The classics can console. But not enough.

**"Sea Grapes" from COLLECTED POEMS 1948-1984
by Derek Walcott.
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Fame

This is Fame: Sundays,
an emptiness
as in Balthus,

cobbled alleys,
sunlit, aureate,
a wall, a brown tower

at the end of a street,
a blue without bells,
like a dead canvas

set in its white
frame, and flowers:
gladioli, lame

gladioli, stone petals
in a vase. The choir's
sky-high praise

turned off. A book
of prints that turns
by itself. The ticktock

of high heels on a sidewalk.
A crawling clock.
A craving for work.

**"Fame" from THE ARKANSAS TESTAMENT by Derek Walcott.
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Article

A single, homeless, circling satellite:
Derek Walcott, 1992 Nobel Prize laureate in literature

by Jöran Mjöberg*
This article was published on 26 June 2001.

Background and youth

Black and white ancestry

Derek Walcott was born in 1930 on St. Lucia, an island then belonging to the British Empire, but which became independent in 1979. St. Lucia has a hybrid British/French culture, having alternated as a colony of either England or France across the centuries. Walcott's ancestry is also mixed, with both his maternal and paternal grandmothers being black. His mother was a respected teacher at a Methodist infant school while his father died when Derek was only one year old.

St. Lucia became independent in 1979, but maintains its hybrid British and French culture to this day.

The young painter

His civil servant father had been an amateur painter, and the son has also devoted much of his grown-up life to painting, not to mention the many references to the great names in art all through his literary works. When growing up in Castries, the capital of St. Lucia, young Walcott attended St. Mary's College where his most important mentor was a painter, Harold Simmons. He soon took an interest in great European artists like Cézanne, Gauguin, and van Gogh.

A 1969 photo of Derek Walcott painting in Trinidad (left) and a self-portrait (oil on canvas) done in 1998.

Published poet at 14, dramatist at 16

While the town of Castries had an Europeanized culture, Afro-Caribbean folk customs and traditions dominated the countryside of St. Lucia. Walcott published his first poem when he was just fourteen. At sixteen he wrote five plays and had his first collection of poetry published. By the age of twenty, Walcott was ready to found a theatre company on his own, the ST. LUCIA ARTS GUILD. In its inaugural year, this company produced his play *Henri-Christophe,* whose subject was taken from the colonial history of another Caribbean island, namely Haiti.

At 16, Walcott wrote five plays.

Academic studies

After graduating from St. Mary's College, Walcott continued his studies in another part of the Caribbean, on the island of Jamaica, where he attended the University College of the West Indies at Mona. Here he obtained his bachelor's degree in 1953. At the

University College, he was both the editor of the student magazine and the president of MONA DRAMATIC SOCIETY.

The search for an identity

A central theme that runs throughout Walcott's works is his search for identity. From the beginning, he has intensely felt the antagonisms between the cultural heritage of the Old World and the traditions of the new one. In his critical work *Derek Walcott,* published in 1999, John Thieme describes the conflicts Walcott has experienced between the positions of European and African, Anglophone and Francophone, Standard English and Creole, and Methodist and Catholic. In the earlier collections of poetry, Thieme traces "a sense of lost perfection, cracked innocence and psychic fragmentation," which he considers to be a result of the racial divisions of the Caribbean society. In one volume after another, by means of a variety of important poems, Walcott tries to find expressions for the difficulties inherent in Caribbean identity. In "A Far Cry from Africa" (1962) he depicts his desperate dilemma in rather brutal formulations:

The gorilla wrestles with the superman.
I who am poisoned by the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?

Yet, in his fascinating essay of 1970, "What the Twilight Says," where he delivers a report about the origin of his interest in the theatre, he sounds more optimistic, hoping to be able to make creative use of his cultural schizophrenia.

In the poem "The Schooner Flight" (1979), Shabine, a Walcott persona, gives an often quoted definition of the identity of a person from a small country in the Caribbean:

I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I am nobody, or I am a nation

In reality, this meant:

I had no nation now but the imagination

In a somewhat later work, "North and South" (1981), this poem's persona gives another effort to express an identity, referring to himself as

a colonial upstart at the end of an empire,
a single, homeless, circling satellite

At an early stage, Walcott was seized by an interest in the situation of St. Lucia. This grew into a promise to chronicle his island, a vow taken together with a painter friend. Walcott's early play, *Henri-Christophe,* was connected with this intense desire to depict and express the essence of his Caribbean surroundings.

In a later context, Walcott managed with deeper penetration than ever before to give form to a mature attitude to this theme, with a kind of acceptance of the trespasses of his ancestors through the centuries. Here follows the end and epitome of his

extremely interesting essay "The Muse of History," published in 1976 and re-published in 1998 in the essays with the title "What the Twilight Says":

> I accept this archipelago of the Americas, I say to the ancestor who sold me, and to the ancestor who bought me, I have no father, I want no such father, although I can understand you, black ghost, white ghost, when you both whisper "history," for if I attempt to forgive you both I am falling into your idea of history which justifies and explains and expiates, and it is not mine to forgive, my memory cannot summon any filial love, since your features are anonymous and erased and I have no wish and no power to pardon. You were when you acted your roles, your given, historical roles of slave seller and slave buyer, men acting as men, and also you, father in the filth-ridden gut of the slave ship, to you they were also men, your fellowman and tribesman not moved or hovering with hesitation about your common race any longer than my other bastard ancestor hovered with his whip, but to you, inwardly forgiven grandfathers, I, like the more honest of my race, give a strange thanks.

These are moving words for a person who feels himself exiled from the Eden of his grandfathers. We may be sure that this reconciliation has cost Walcott much but provided him with deep inner peace. But if we think of its universal consequences, this does not mean that there should exist any universal forgiveness for brutality. Thus, Walcott has no forgiveness when he asks in *Omeros* whether he might have broken his pen when he started writing poetry forty years earlier, if he had realized that

> this century's pastorals were being written
> by the chimneys of Dachau, of Auschwitz, of Sachsenhausen

Fascinated by the thoughts of explorers.

Explorers

Walcott is also fascinated by thoughts of the first men to discover and visit the world to which he belongs. These were explorers like Columbus, Walter Raleigh, and James Cook, as well as rebels like Toussaint and Henri-Christophe. To Walcott, Robinson Crusoe, more than anybody else, is a real archetype, and his long poem, "Crusoe's Island" (published in the 1965 volume *The Castaway*), contains in addition to a detailed geographic and psychological characterization, simple, lucid lines like the following ones:

Upon this rock the bearded hermit built
His Eden:
Goats, corn crop, fort, parasol, garden,
Bible for Sabbath, all the joys
But one
Which sent him howling for a human voice.
Exiled by a flaming sun
The rotting nut, bowled in the surf,
Became his own brain rotting from the guilt
Of heaven without his kind,
Crazed by such paradisal calm
The spinal shadow of a palm
Built keel and gunwale in his mind.

In the 1978 play *Pantomime,* Walcott used only two characters, Robinson and Friday, in an ironic, modernized variation of their personal relationship that takes place on the island of Tobago. In his important, autobiographical collection of poetry, *Another Life,* 1973, he also speaks about the task of those who first came over the seas to inhabit the American world:

We were blest with a virginal, unpainted world
with Adam's task of giving things their names

An important part of Walcott's poetry and drama has as a partly subconscious program, the "Caribbeanization" of earlier, European motives. Thus, when he studies and admires the plays of John Synge and his depiction of Aran fishermen, as well as the filmatic work of the Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, he works by creating St. Lucian counterparts, simple fishermen speaking their patois.

"Preparing the Net," 1999, oil on canvas by Derek Walcott.

The dramatic work

Walcott's dramatic work is as important as his poetry. Today, he has written about twenty-five plays, although not all of them have been published. He has defined himself as "not only a playwright but a company," the reason being that he has worked as much as an instructor and as founder of theatre companies as a playwright. After starting "St. Lucia Arts Guild" in 1950, he opened "Little Carib Theatre Workshop" in

1961. He had then hired a small troop of part-time actors, who could survive because they had other part-time occupations besides. They were nevertheless working under unsure economic conditions, with occasional contributions from the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1966, Walcott's company changed its name to "Trinidad Theatre Workshop". As its success gradually grew, the new company made guest performances abroad – in Jamaica, Guyana, Toronto (Canada), Boston, and New York (the USA). Walcott himself has worked at different places teaching, including Boston University as a professor of drama.

Among Walcott's earlier plays, *Ti-Jean and his Brothers* has a background in Caribbean folklore, while *Dream on Monkey Mountain,* his dramatic masterpiece, takes place on his own island of St. Lucia. The latter work's social inspiration derives from Jean-Paul Sartre's theories about the black Orpheus, as well as from Frantz Fanon, the French sociologist who impressed the peoples of the Western colonies so deeply with his work *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1956).

Dream on Monkey Mountain

The *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967) belongs to the twentieth-century genre called dream plays, connected with works by playwrights such as Strindberg as well as by Synge and Soyinka. The play's main character is Makak (French patois for "Ape"), a black charcoal-burner who comes to town, gets drunk, and is taken into custody by Corporal Lestrade, a mulatto guard who is the maintainer of law and order during the later years of the colonial power. In a dream scene of a mock trial that was probably inspired by Kafka and Hesse, Lestrade accuses Makak of being intoxicated and damaging the premises of a local salesman. However, in another vivid dream sequence, Makak is crowned king in the romantic Africa of his roots, surrounded by his wives, his warriors, and the masks of pagan gods.

In a second mock trial, a number of great Western characters (e.g., Plato, Ptolemy, Dante, Cecil Rhodes, Florence Nightingale) are accused of neglecting other races and sentenced to death by the African tribes. Lestrade has now given up his confession to the Western world, shouldered his black inheritance, and sworn allegiance to Makak. The poor charcoal-burner is acquitted from the charges, and able to withdraw to his West Indian world with a deepened sense of identity.

The dream visions in this play seem to belong both to Makak and to the collective atmosphere of the plot. Ironic effects appear throughout the events. At the same time as Makak's romantic dream of Africa is presented, he cherishes a fantasy of a white protectress who takes care of him. But, as suggested by Lestrade, he gives up this dream, brutally beheading the woman with an African sword. This is a sacrifice that expresses a sound reaction against a fantasy life alienated from reality. Makak's character also bears symbolic similarities with Christ: in prison, he is followed by two robbers, and from Good Friday he is able to look forward to the moment of resurrection on Easter Sunday. The prison can be understood as a symbol both of life itself and of colonial rule. In a sophisticated way, this play expresses central components of Walcott's attitude to the political, racial, and psychological problems in his post-colonial world.

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain,* Walcott makes a great effort to interpret the nature of Caribbean identity. Colonialism has been important in damaging the human soul and humiliating the inhabitants of this part of the world. But there is no point trying to build castles in the air, as when Makak dreams of his African roots. At the end, in the epilogue, this simple-hearted visionary proletarian is acquitted, while Western civilization with its great characters is sentenced to death. Regardless of this, hate and revenge are negligible – in fact, negative – factors to the writer Walcott.

From Seville to Babylon

By *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (1958), Walcott had more seriously started to embrace song and dance in the plot. He had been very successful with his first musicals, *The Joker of Seville* (1974) and *O Babylon* (1976). The former is a re-working of Tirso de Molina's play *El burlador de Sevilla,* and deals with the Don Juan character and its sexual and moral aspects, while at the same time taking up folk traditions and folk music (calypso) from Trinidad. *O Babylon* goes back to Walcott's experiences in Jamaica and deals with the opinions of a religious and political sect of this island, the Rastafarians, and their rejection of Western culture. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain,* the dances, the miming, and the masquerades take on an even wider role.

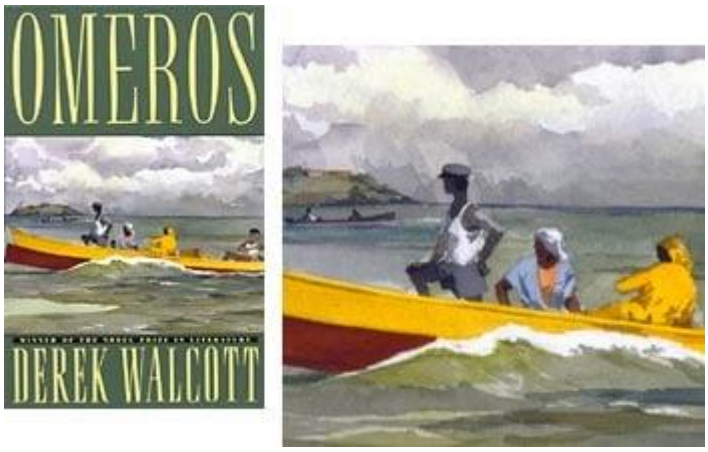
A poster done by Derek Walcott for the play "O Babylon".

The "Homeric" works

Omeros

From his early youth, Walcott had a great interest in both the sea and the Homeric world, calling the latter "an echo in the throat." Comparatively recently, he devoted two works to this subject: *Omeros* (1990) and *The Odyssey – A Stage Version* (1993). *Omeros* is a work divided into one hundred and ninety-two songs, written in a rhythmic blank verse with a richness of poetic metaphors and similes. In the French title, Walcott makes poetic pun in that *mer* evokes the sense of both "sea" and "mother," and "o" signifies the sound blown through a conch from the sea. This great work presents a reversible world, a colonial or post-colonial model corresponding to the original Homeric world. This is an epic poetic tale, with a multitude of different short stories, flashbacks, conversations, monologues, episodes, descriptions, and

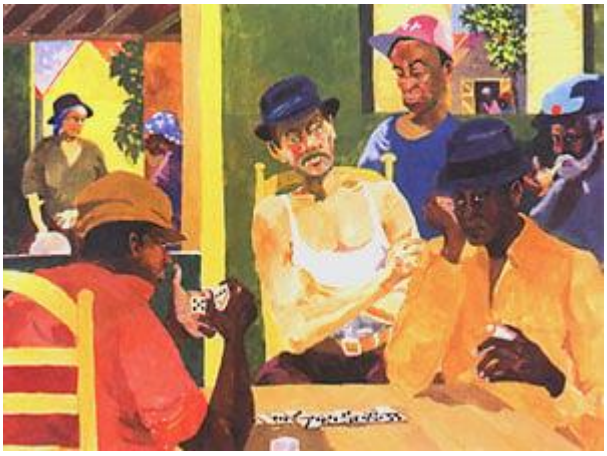
impressions, depicting in a minutely detailed way the Caribbean world and all its everyday life, its human beings, animals, nature, waters, and woods.



The book cover of "Omeros", using the painting done by Derek Walcott (right).

In *Omeros,* Homer himself appears in a row of different shapes. He is the blind Greek poet himself, the blind popular poet Seven Seas, the African *griot* or rhapsodist, the famous American painter Winslow H o m e r (with his paintings from the Atlantic Ocean), Virgil (the Roman counterpart to the Greek poet), and a blind barge-man who turns up on the stairs of the London church St. Martin-in-the-Fields with a manuscript refused by the editors. Even the personalities correspond to the Homeric ones: Philoctete, the wounded archer; Major Plunkett, a contemporary Philoctete; Achilles, here the son of an African slave; Hector, a fisherman; Helen, intentionally made into a very commonplace and approachable young Caribbean woman. Walcott's post-colonial world, a world where many slaves had classic Greek names, in many different ways corresponds to Rome and Greece. How could the poet, he says, while listening to the quarrel of two fishermen in his hometown, avoid thinking of quarreling Homeric characters?

Walcott's text is crowded with thoughts and reflections on history: "the farthest exclamations of history are written by a flag of smoke," exemplified by Troy, Carthage, Pompeii; "art is history's nostalgia," implying that literature carries the same guilt as history and history is midden built on midden. Likewise, as a background to the life of people in our time, Walcott refers to violent events in history: the siege of Troy, the extermination of the Aruac people in the Caribbean by conquistadors, the eighteenth-century fights in the Caribbean between the English and French navies, as well as the prolonged catastrophe that extinguished most native Americans. Or the cruel attacks on African villages by slave traders, the perpetual tragedy of the captives who had to leave their homes, their families, their professions, and their tools, to try to create a new identity beyond the Atlantic; Ibos, Guineans, and many others.



"Domino Players", (gouache on paper), done by Derek Walcott in 1999.

The Odyssey

In a similar manner, the theatre production *The Odyssey* testifies to Walcott's deep interest, or rather involvement, in the Homeric world. There are, indeed, similarities between *Omeros* and *The Odyssey,* but there are also major differences. As a dramatic work, *The Odyssey* is divided into two acts, the first with fourteen scenes, the second with six. The speeches are short, usually only one line each, with the exception of the songs sung by the blind Billy Blue, who is a more modern version of Homer. Now and then, in a number of lines, the speeches have endings that form natural rhymes. The characters are well-known from Homer and include Penelope, Odysseus' wife, who has to wait for his return from Troy for twenty years; Telemachus, his son; his old nurse on Ithaca, Eurycleia, who is the first to recognize him when he comes back at last from his many adventures; and Eumaeus, the shepherd. There are also the kings visited by Telemachus when he seeks his father: Nestor of Pylos and Menelaos of Sparta. We meet with the sailors of Odysseus' ship; King Alcinous and his daughter Nausicaa on the isle of the Phaeacians; Cyclops, the dangerous giant; Circe, the seductress; and in a short scene, corresponding to the sixth song of Homer's work, Odysseus' own mother Anticlea in the Underworld.

This does not mean, however, that all these characters are copies of those in the Greek Odyssey. Walcott is strikingly independent in forming different personalities. This work is not characterized by the same breadth and depth of the descriptions as in *Omeros,* but its dramatic verve, its liveliness, and its exquisite sense of humor distinguish it. We may accompany Odysseus from the victory at Troy, over his different stations on his way home, as well as we become more closely acquainted with Telemachus on his different expeditions and with Penelope in her difficult position in Ithaca. And the final scenes where Odysseus comes home and is at last recognized by Penelope and Telemachus do not lose any of the thrilling effects connected with the original Homeric situation. With its light, witty dialogue, it is in some ways more accessible than its poetic relative. Together, these two works provide some idea of Walcott's rich cultural and political outlook over the seas and continents of the human world.

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* **Jöran Mjöberg** (1913-2006) was professor of comparative literature and the author of literary studies as well as books about different countries (Iceland, Mexico, USA). His first work, *Dikt och diktatur,* appeared in the last year of

World War II and was a survey of Swedish fiction and poetry that was inspired by a criticism and condemnation of Hitler and Nazi ideology (1933-1944). He has been lecturer at the University of Oslo (1947-1949) and taught Scandinavian languages and civilization at Harvard University from 1949 to 1953. Teaching at Växjö (Växjö Katedralskola) from 1953 to 1969 and at Lund University from 1969 to 1980, he has published a presentation of Latin American literature (*Latinamerikanska författare*, 1988), a study on visionary poetry during different epochs (*De såg himmel och helvete*, 1994), a book about the role of architecture in fiction and drama (*Arkitektur i litteratur*, 1999) and studies on the lyrical contribution of the Swedish poets Erik Axel Karlfeldt and Pär Lagerkvist.

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Press Release

Swedish Academy
The Permanent Secretary

Press release
October 8, 1992

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1992
Derek Walcott

"for a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment"

This year the Swedish Academy has decided to award the Nobel Prize for Literature to Derek Walcott. Walcott, who is 62 was born in Saint Lucia but now lives in Trinidad. He has both African and European blood in his veins. In him West Indian culture has found its great poet. He also has a chair in English at Boston University.

Walcott showed his mettle early on. As the title of his substantial volume of "Collected Poems 1948-1984" shows, he was already writing poetry of lasting value at the end of his teens. Like Brodsky and Paz he has an intense belief in poetry and poets and he has made this one of his themes.
Otherwise it is the complexity of his own situation that has provided one of the most fruitful sources of inspiration. Three loyalties are central for him – the Caribbean where he lives, the English language, and his African origin. In the poem "A Far Cry from Africa", he says "How choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?" One of his major works, the long poem "Another Life" (1973), is devoted to his development and the course of his education in this environment.

In his collection of poems "The Arkansas Testament" (1987) he continues the broadening of perspective which is also a characteristic of his oeuvre. Among these poems can be found works dedicated to Marina Tsvetaeva and W.H. Auden ("Strict as Psalm or Lesson, / I learnt your poetry").

Walcott's latest poetic work is "Omeros" (1990), a majestic Caribbean epos in 64 chapters – "I sang our wide country, the Caribbean Sea". This is a work of incomparable ambitiousness, in which Walcott weaves his many strands into a whole. Its weft is a rich one, deriving from the poet's wide-ranging contacts with literature, history and reality. We find Homer, Poe, Mayakovsky and Melville, allusions are made to Brodsky (" the parentheses of palms / shielding a candle's tongue"), and he quotes the Beatles' "Yesterday". Walcott's metaphors and images are numerous, and often striking – "And beyond them, like dominoes / with lights for holes, the black skyscrapers of Boston". He captures white seagulls against a blue sky in the image "Gulls chalk the blue enamel". His poetry acquires at one and the same time singular lustre and great force.

Walcott is in the first place a poet but he has also produced interesting work for the theatre. His masterstroke was "Dream on Monkey Mountain" (1970), a striking but scenographically demanding Caribbean fresco. The same dream-like atmosphere can be found in several of his plays, such as "Ti-Jean and His Brothers" (1958) and, to a certain extent, in "The Last Carnival" (in "Three Plays" (1986), which deals with two important decades in the recent history of Trinidad. A significant feature of his plays is the skill with which the author plays on his own complex range of voices. It is impossible, however, to reproduce this in the totally different language situation of Sweden.

Walcott's style is melodious and sensitive. It seems to issue principally from a prolific inspiration. In his literary works Walcott has laid a course for his own cultural environment, but through them he speaks to each and every one of us.

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Awards and Honours

- 1969: Cholmondeley Award
- 1971: Obie Award for Best Foreign Play (for *Dream on Monkey Mountain*)
- 1972: Officer of the Order of the British Empire
- 1981: MacArthur Foundation Fellowship ("genius award")
- 1988: Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry
- 1990: Arts Council of Wales International Writers Prize
- 1990: W. H. Smith Literary Award (for poetry *Omeros*)
- 1992: Nobel Prize in Literature
- 2004: Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Lifetime Achievement
- 2008: Honorary doctorate from the University of Essex
- 2011: T. S. Eliot Prize (for poetry collection *White Egrets*)
- 2011: OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature (for *White Egrets*)
- 2015: Griffin Trust For Excellence in Poetry Lifetime Recognition Award
- 2016: Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Lucia

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Videos

01] Derek Walcott: The Perpetual Ideal is Astonishment
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZxySOMSxOs [33:44]

"I'm gonna read some new poems, so you can mark the decline." This is how Derek Walcott—poet, playwright, Nobel Laureate—introduced his reading here at the Poetry Center in September of 2007. In April, those new poems were published as White Egrets, Mr. Walcott's fourteenth collection. To mark the occasion, we offer a recording of his reading from the then-unpublished manuscript.

Reviewing the book recently for The New York Times, Karl Kirchwey, poet and former Poetry Center director, wrote:

"Walcott has deliberately avoided the confessional path pioneered by his early friend and supporter Robert Lowell, choosing instead a post-Romantic voice, closely allied with landscape, in which the particulars of a life are incidental to a larger poetic vision, one in which the self is not the overt subject.

[White Egrets] is both visionary, in the best sense of that word, and intensely personal, even autobiographical. It is an old man's book, craving one more day of light and warmth; and it is a book of stoic reckoning."

02] Modern-ish Poets Series 2: Derek Walcott

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eevwCScj-A0 [56:51]
Seamus Perry and Mark Ford discuss the life and work of the Saint Lucian Nobel laureate Derek Walcott, the island poet and playwright surrounded by an oceanic consciousness, whose writing recognises at once the terrible gulfs between peoples and our common predicament.

03]Derek Walcott| *A Far Cry from Africa*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIuczkxNLC0 [1:14:35]

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An Interview with
Derek Walcott

https://raintaxi.com/close-reading-an-interview-with-derek-walcott/

by Michael Swingen

There was a predawn chill in the morning wind as I waited in the downtown port of Fort-de-France to board the ferry for St. Lucia. It was Christmas time last year, and in the boarding station St. Lucians chatted with holiday cheer as they waited for the return passage home. They had travelled across the blue channel to Martinique, one of the neighbouring French islands, to buy Christmas presents to bring home to their families. Martinique has an Antillean reputation for sophistication, and St. Lucians carried with them bags full of chocolates in pink boxes, transparent cases of artisanal pastries, and wine bottles with elaborate crests on their labels. I, too, was going home for the holidays. It was cheaper to fly out of St. Lucia than Martinique, where I was teaching English in a high school for the year, and the boarding station where I waited with the St. Lucians overlooked the bay that led to the blue channel that divided the two islands.

It was late at night when I reached my Bed & Breakfast. Despite the midnight hour, my host Wendy was electric when she opened the front door, lively as palm fronds applauding themselves in the wind. She laughed and sometimes clapped as she gave me a tour of her small gabled house on the quiet outskirts of the capital. She had just self-published a children's novel, she told me, which she displayed on the side table next to the orange sofa, where she sat across from me in the living room. I asked her if she had ever read Derek Walcott, who was also from St. Lucia. She was friends, she laughed, with Mr. Walcott's companion Sigrid Nama. Wendy got up from the sofa, headed for her

old rotary dial phone next to her computer, and called up Sigrid. She explained that there was a young man here who would like to meet Mr. Walcott. Sigrid told Wendy that I should come by their house in two weeks. By the way, I heard Wendy say, would Mr. Walcott be interested in conducting an interview for *Rain Taxi Review of Books*?

During the holidays, while all those blizzards were raging across the East Coast and burying New York and Boston in snow, I researched and prepared for the interview with a ferocious intensity, predicated less upon scrupulousness and more on animal terror. After all, after six decades of transforming the Caribbean world into the permanence of poetry, Derek Walcott, a Nobel Laureate, is one of the lions of world literature. In the first decades of his career, a large part of Walcott's ambition was to bring his native St. Lucia into literature for the first time. Many of his early poems aim to show that the Caribbean—its people and landscape and history—belongs in English poetry no less than England itself. *Omeros*, Walcott's retelling of the *Iliad* on the shores of his native St. Lucia, for example, is taught in many college classrooms and has become a staple of postcolonial literature. But for Walcott the oppositions between empire and province—and, inevitably, between black and white—can never be easily reduced to simple postcolonial dictums that declare an artist deploy her craft to strike back against ex-imperial masters. "It is the [English] language which is the empire," Walcott has written, "and great poets are not its vassals but its princes." From this private sensibility evolves an oeuvre—seventeen poetry collections, nine volumes of drama, and a book of essays—of a poetic imagination unparalleled in the almost magical gift of rendering the world transformed by the power and grace of language. How to prepare for an interview, then, with a writer of this caliber?

And so I devoured all the Walcott I hadn't already read, holed up in my parents' basement like a hibernating mole. I also read all the interviews Walcott had done in the past. I composed immaculately crafted questions dredged from the deepest abysses of literary theory and my own personal boreholes of confusion. Earlier that year, I had completed a master's program with a thesis on Hart Crane and Stéphane Mallarmé, and I craved to know what Walcott thought of the 20th-century American poet, whom Walcott had written about in his youth. Finally, I sculpted the interview questions, squaring and settling their syntax and turns of phrase (I reproduce them in an appendix to the conversation for those who wish to see how well I succeeded).

When I returned to St. Lucia I did not stay with Wendy again but found rather a quiet room in a fishing village called Gros Islet on the northwestern side of the island. I stayed there for two days before I met Walcott, who lived not far from the village. From the terrace of my room I stooped on the scalloped balcony and watched shirtless boys ride horses without reins or saddles along the bright beaches. The boys would hunch and grip the wispy manes of the horses whinnying, and when either the boys or the horses grew tired, they would ride into the translucent shallows of the turquoise water. Boys riding horses would never happen in Martinique; something about the French-inflected island would not permit it. Like siblings, the islands were different.

When I knocked on Mr. Walcott's and Sigrid Nama's front door, I wore a navy button-down dress shirt with a gold pin dot tie, both of which I had dry cleaned before I left the United States. At the backside of his house, the Nobel Laureate and I sat under the verandah that looked out onto the sea and the sphynx-like Pigeon Island. Walcott's robin's egg blue t-shirt, which matched his swim trunks, had a breast pocket that sheathed two pens. I would later learn that he liked to have a writing utensil always handy in case he had to net any flights of fancy that dare flitter away. I kept my tie on

for the entirety of the interview, but by the end both Derek and Sigrid teased me and requested that I take it off before we went to go eat dinner at the marina.

[The tape recorder is turned on while Walcott is asking me about where I come from.]

Michael Swingen: I'm from the Midwest, North Dakota, although no one knows where North Dakota is, so going to a place like Dartmouth was somewhat intimidating. Maybe you felt that, too.

Derek Walcott: Mhm.

MS: I remember reading this in one of your essays, that the first time you went to New York the "canyons of buildings" terrified you. I had similar feelings; the prestige of Dartmouth absolutely petrified me.

DW: So how long were you at Dartmouth?

MS: Two years, I did a master's degree in comparative literature. I compared Hart Crane to Stéphane Mallarmé.

DW: Do you know French, too?

MS: I do. That's why I'm in Martinique, because I studied French. I speak it pretty well.

DW: Continue talking in French.

MS: Vous voulez que je continue à parler en français ?

DW: Oui.

MS: Ah, parce que vous connaissez le français.

DW: Oui.

MS: A cause du créole alors.

DW: Voilà.

MS: Oui, c'est ça. Quand j'entends le créole en Sainte-Lucie, effectivement, je relève sur le français, donc quand on dit "merci" en créole on dit littéralement "merci, "par exemple ! C'est passionnant.

DW: *[to Sigrid]* He's talking French!

SN: I know, I heard that! You're checking his French out?

DW: He's showing off . . .

SN: *[Laughs]* Alright, I'll let you two chat.

MS: Sure, thank you.

SN: Otherwise I'll take over.

MS: Oh, that's fine. Thank you for the wine. I appreciate it.

SN: You're welcome.

DW: So where are you staying here?

MS: I'm staying in Gros Islet. Just another B&B.

SN: Yeah, which one?

MS: It's called Beaches Inn. It's right on the beach.

SN: The orange place?

MS: Yeah, it's orange.

SN: It's by the river outlet. Right?

MS: Yeah.

SN: "No dumping of refusal." They had a sign there once: "No dumping of refusal."

MS: *[Laughs]*. Of "refusal," not "refuse."

SN: It used to be owned by an Austrian-German guy. How is it? Is it okay?

MS: I like it. Honestly, I think I chose the wrong island. I like St. Lucia more than I like Martinique.

SN: Well, it's a split personality. English and French, you know.

MS: Well, I don't mean to generalize, but I feel that in Martinique, they suffer from Francophilia . . . their *politesse* oppresses them. They're too snobbish. I've never seen the parties in Martinique that I've seen in St. Lucia.

SN: We have a good friend there: Patrick Chamoiseau. He only speaks French though.

MS: I haven't read any of his work.

S: You'll have to read *Texaco* in English.

MS: Oh, I've heard of this book!

DW: So you got a scholarship to Dartmouth?

MS: I did. Which was another reason it was so terrifying. They paid me to go, and that was just that much more pressure.

DW: What was it like physically? What did you have to do?

MS: It was two years, with trimesters, so there's three quarters—fall, winter, spring—and each quarter you take three classes, and you have to be a teacher's assistant, and then you have to do a research assistantship as well, and then at the same time you have to be doing your own research for your thesis.

DW: But you are a poet?

MS: Yeah, that's always been the main goal. Learning French, going to grad school, it's just putting tools on my utility belt. I grew up obsessed with T.S. Eliot, so I had it in my head that I had to do all this shit in order to entertain the idea of being a poet: I had to learn French, I had to go to grad school . . . all while not writing a lot of poetry . . . But now that I finally finished grad school I feel like I can actually go back to the source, to what it was all about.

DW: How long are you going to be staying?

MS: In Martinique?

DW: No, here.

MS: I'm here for two more days. But then I'm back in Martinique until June.

DW: Because that's part of your job, right?

MS: Yeah. I start back up teaching in a week.

DW: Can you come back here on the 23rd?

MS: What's happening the 23rd?

DW: Birthday. We go on a boat on the catamaran in Soufrière.

MS: What day is the 23rd?

DW: Saturday.

MS: I'd like to make that. I can make that.

DW: Because there will be some nice guys there. Young Italian poets. Italian women, too. Very nice people. About 40 of them. Come on the boat, definitely. Find out how you'll do it, right? Ask Sigrid.

MS: I just have to take the ferry. It's not difficult taking the ferry from Martinique to St. Lucia, it's only an hour and a half. In American terms that's, you know, like that *[I snap my fingers]*. I grew up traveling from North Dakota to Montana for ski trips. That was an 18-hour car ride.

DW: 18 hours?

MS: I'm as far east in North Dakota as you can get, it borders Minnesota. So all the way across North Dakota, and then all the way across Montana. 18-hour car ride for a weekend ski trip.

DW: You don't mean 18 . . .

MS: Yes, 18! North Dakota and Montana are huge, you know. They're huge states.

DW: So how many hours on the plane?

MS: Oh, maybe two or so? But 18 hours driving.

DW: You would take the car instead of a plane? Why? Money?

MS: Probably, but that's just what my family did. I don't know. Do you think I could read your poem "Hart Crane" out loud and then you could tell me what Hart Crane meant to you?

DW: I would hate that.

MS: Why?

DW: *[Laughs]* I don't know.

MS: I just think it would be so cool to read poetry with you. Can I read "O Carib Isle!"?

DW: Is that a Crane poem?

MS: Yes.

DW: What's the point of this?

MS: Um, the point of it is that when I was sixteen years old I found Hart Crane, and it blew my mind, it melted my brain out of my ears . . .

DW: How old were you?

MS: Sixteen.

DW: So you were astonished at the metaphors and stuff like that?

MS: Yeah, exactly. I still can't believe the things he wrote. "In alternating bells have you not heard / All hours clapped dense into a single stride?" I mean shit like that, it's absolutely insane. And I don't remember how I found your work, but I'm pretty damn sure it had to do with Hart Crane. When I found you and read *In a Green Night*, I saw Hart Crane all over your poems. So that's why I want to ask you how you found him, and what he meant to you.

DW: You know "To Brooklyn Bridge"?

MS: Of course, yeah.

DW: Let me hear how much you know.

MS: Okay, um . . .

DW: "How many dawns . . ."

MS: "How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest, / The seagulls wings shall dip and pivot him" . . . and then he . . . he says, "chained high". . . over something something "Liberty," with a capital L. Do you remember the full quatrain?

DW: I'm trying to remember the third line.

MS: *[Gets book out]* "How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest / The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him, / Shedding white rings of tumult . . ."

DW: Now tell me about that line. What does Crane see in that line?

MS: "Shedding white rings of tumult?" Um, what I honestly see, do you know how in cartoons when something is moving really fast, there's lines going behind it?

DW: Yeah.

MS: Well, Crane is writing this line before cartoons like that probably existed, but I feel like he's trying to articulate the motion of the seagull, and he's describing—invisible to most people—wings of tumult as the seagull moves . . .

DW: White *rings* of tumult, not wings . . .

MS: White *rings*, I know, I know, as if the seagull's leaving the bridge or coming back and the motion of his wings is shedding rings . . . [I try looking at the book]

DW: No, don't look at it.

MS: Okay.

DW: Now you saw that at 16?

MS: Well, I think Crane helped me see it.

DW: What about "building high / Over the chained bay waters Liberty–": Tell me about that line.

MS: That line has always confused me.

DW: "Building" *what*?

MS: White waters . . .

DW: No . . . "Shedding white rings of tumult," "building high," right? That's a *verb*.

MS: Right. Oh, *building*. It's probably the bridge.

DW: No, it's not the bridge. It's the *statue*.

MS: Oh, it's the Statue of Liberty, hence "Liberty" at the end of the line. That's incredible.

DW: Now, "building high" over the what?

MS: "The chained bay waters Liberty."

DW: Why "chained"?

MS: Uh . . .

DW: You know Dylan Thomas?

MS: Sure.

DW: He has a line: "Though I sang in my chains like the sea." What does that mean?

MS: What it makes me think of is Crane's poem "The Broken Tower," when he compares himself to the sexton, the one who actually rings the bell in the belfry, saying: "And I, its sexton slave" . . . it's almost as if Crane is burdened by his immense creativity, that it was too much for him to handle. I think that's maybe what both Thomas and Crane mean by "chained."

DW: The image in Dylan Thomas is: "Though I sang in my chains like the sea . . ."

MS: I don't understand "like the sea," what does that mean?

DW: It'll come to you miraculously when you look at it. You know how the waves do this? *[He revolves his pointer finger in the figure of a circle]* Those are chains.

MS: That is fantastic.

DW: "Building high over the chained bay waters," you see it?

MS: I see it now, that's incredible. Just that somebody could see that and articulate it.

DW: Right. So go back to the first stanza. Start it again. "How many dawns . . ."

MS: "How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
Over the chained bay waters Liberty—"

DW: You know, I've taught this a lot, you notice how soft the beginning is in terms of vowels . . . Why is that?

MS: Because it's dawn, and dawn is soft, it's blurred . . . the phonetics are mimicking the scene they're describing.

DW: You think you're fuckin' bright, don't you?

MS: *[Laughs]* No . . .

DW: Because that's right, that's perfectly right.

MS: Well, that's kind of what my thesis was about. I feel like a lot of Crane's content, in his poetry, is interpreting the rhetorical figures that that content is written in . . . So for example the first couplet in *White Buildings*, from "Legend," goes: "As silent as a mirror is believed / Realities plunge in silence by . . ." That couplet is shaped in the form of a rhetorical trope called chiasmus, a sentence where you have two parts and the second part repeats but inverts the first. So you have Ovid saying, "I flee who chases me, and chase who flees me": The second part repeats the first but then flips it. In Crane's couplet, "As silent as a mirror is believed / Realities plunge in silence by . . .," the second line subtly mimics the first; so when he's using this mirror-like rhetorical trope he's not writing about love or war, he's actually writing about mirrors, he's writing about reflection. So it's as if the content is interpreting its own rhetorical structure.

DW: What is the meaning of "believed" in the poem—what "believes"?

MS: Say again?

DW: Who is believing? What is believing?

MS: I'm not sure, what do you think?

DW: The poem is itself a mirror. The mirror is believed the way a poem is believed. It's believed because it's there.

MS: Right . . .that makes me think how at the same time, the poem admits the idea of narcissism. That first couplet, "As silent as a mirror is believed / Realities plunge in silence by . . . "—it almost stages that moment when Narcissus is looking at his own reflection in the pond.

DW: You think it's a pond or a page?

MS: I think *[confused]* . . . Well, he uses the word "plunge," which suggests both pond and page.

DW: So who is looking?

MS: My opinion: the language itself. It refuses to be a reference for anything outside of itself.

DW: Okay, let's begin again. "As silent as a mirror is believed . . ." That is staggering, isn't it?

MS: Yeah, definitely.

DW: What's staggering about it?

MS: Hmm . . . mirrors are supposed to be a faithful replication of what's in them, right? But they're always changing, they flip what's in them . . . If you hold text up to a mirror, for example, it's seen backwards, right? So "As silent as a mirror is believed . . ." I don't know, what do you think?

DW: Let's go down a bit more. "As silent as a mirror is believed . . ." Just the action in that is fantastic. We look and see what we see in a mirror, and we believe it. That's important, the question of belief. The question is: Should we believe what we see in a mirror?

MS: Oh, right. Yeah, that's fantastic.

DW: The second part of that is: "Realities plunge in silence by . . ." So what keeps multiplying images? The mirror, right? The thing that is believed is a reality.

MS: But it "plunges in silence by . . ." So is it plunging in the mirror?

DW: Yeah. One of the questions it asks is: Is the believer to be believed?

MS: Right.

DW: I look in the mirror. There's me. What's in the mirror is not real. So am I unreal? You see that?

MS: Yeah, I see that.

DW: Did you see that before?

MS: No, not before, no.

DW: You did in a way though.

MS: Crane's poetry to me is unmediated language, it's immediate, there's no outside reference. I feel like for Crane to reach that level of language requires sacrifice, maybe almost death, which is why I thought the first couplet has Narcissus in it. After that opening couplet he writes: "I am not ready for repentance; / Nor to match regrets."

DW: Those are the next lines?

MS: Yeah, that's the third line: "I am not ready for repentance," semicolon, "Nor to match regrets." So it's as if Crane's desire is kind of suspended—I am not ready to repent, nor am I ready to match, to equal my sins.

DW: What does that have to do with the mirror?

MS: Okay, so after that he goes: "For the moth / Bends no more than the still / Imploring flame," which is the figure of Icarus! So in the opening couplet you have Narcissus looking at his own reflection, which is vanity, and then Crane reveals the extreme ambition of Icarus, too . . .

DW: Let me ask you one general question, which is crucial: Do you believe that Crane's belief in the poem was planned and charted, or did it come as inspiration?

MS: Inspiration, 100%.

DW: Hold on. But with its own logic?

MS: Yes, and that's the key, that's why Crane is the top of the top. That's why he's a real poet, like you. The poems develop their own internal system of logic.

DW: Since it deals with belief and surfaces, then it has to do with belief and poetry. You see that?

MS: Yeah, absolutely.

DW: How do you see it?

MS: It's the first couplet again: Mirrors do reflect, so it's as if they're superficial, but it's not a mirror actually, it's a pool of water, and that has great depth under it.

DW: Well, I think the object is a mirror!

MS: But Crane is saying *something* is on the other side. That despite the fact that mirrors reflect, that they seem superficial, there is depth to them at the same time.

DW: Are you changing it from a mirror to a pool of water?

MS: I am, because I think that couplet evokes Narcissus, when he's looking at himself . . .

DW: You're bigger than that, these Greek evocations. That's for undergraduate stuff, all these myths.

MS: *[Laughs]*

DW: I'm not saying that they're not there . . . but I'm going to jump to a demonstration of Crane's spectacular gift in metaphor: "O, like the lizard in the furious noon . . ." That's hair raising, isn't it?

MS: Yeah, it is. It is.

DW: The lizard is in the middle of "noon."

MS: Oh, wow.

DW: Physically in the middle of "noon." You with me?

MS: Yeah, I'm with you. I've never thought of that before.

DW: I'm not finished.

MS: *[Laughs]*

DW: Why "furious"? That's Elizabethan, it's Marlowe: "furious noon." It comes from *Tamburlaine*.

MS: Crane was obsessed with the Elizabethans.

DW: "O, like the lizard in the furious noon, / That drops his legs and colors in the sun . . ." What we have is the desert . . . Crane goes out into the desert, and it's high noon: O-O-N . . . Zero, Zero, N . . . Zero, Zero, the face of the sun, and when the sun is depicted at that time of day, it's depicted with air around it, like . . .

MS: Like the corona . . .

DW: Exactly. It's angry. It's angry because it's hot. So we go back . . . "O, like the lizard in the furious noon, / That drops his legs and colors in the sun . . ." I don't think I have Crane here. You have Crane?

MS: Yeah, right here.

DW: You look for it.

MS: Is that in his *Key West: An Island Sheaf*?

DW: *The Bridge*. Look for, um . . . Do you have first lines?

MS: First lines?

DW: First lines . . . in the index in the back.

MS: Ah, ok . . . No, there's no first lines . . .

DW: Yeah, I can see them. What's that there?

MS: No, these are his letters. See if you can find it *[hands book to Walcott]*. Do you remember when you first found Crane what it was like for you?

DW: Oh, I was young . . . I was reading everything.

MS: Did you write a lot of poetry when you were in school?

DW: Yeah.

MS: I found that so difficult. To do schoolwork and write at the same time.

DW: Ok. Here we go.

MS: You found it?

DW: "O, like the lizard in the furious noon,
That drops his legs and colors in the sun,
—And laughs, pure serpent, Time itself, and moon
Of his own fate, I saw thy change begun!"

The lizard is supposed to lose his legs, right? And guess what happens?

MS: They change color?

DW: Not only color. He "drops his legs."

MS: Ah, he sheds them. When a bird is about to attack a lizard, it sheds its tail as a decoy . . .

DW: What would physically happen if it lost its legs? What would the shape be?

MS: It'd be an O, wouldn't it? Oh wow.

DW: Zero. Did you ever see that?

MS: No, never.

DW: There's always more to see.

MS: It's inexhaustible.

DW: This is why, in theory, he's the greatest American poet at that point.

MS: I agree.

DW: So he sees the process of the lizard that he's looking at dropping his legs because of high noon and becoming a what?

MS: I don't know.

DW: No legs.

MS: A serpent!

DW: Brilliant. You get it.

MS: That's incredible.

DW: That is a myth. An Indian myth *right there*.

MS: Mhm.

DW: So what's he saying? I'm in the desert. I look down and see this creature lose its legs and tail and become "pure serpent." But what does that zero do? That O? In terms of time?

MS: Well, zero represents infinity because there's no beginning or end.

DW: Did he show you that?

MS: I don't know who showed me that.

DW: "O, like the lizard in the furious noon,
That drops his legs and colors in the sun,
—And laughs, pure serpent, Time itself, and moon
Of his own fate, I saw thy change begun!"

Time itself is in the zero. It's the symbol of time, of infinity. *[He looks again at the book]* Jesus Christ, he doesn't stop . . .

MS: *[Laughs]*

DW: "And moon / Of his own fate."

MS: There's the circle again. It's turned into the "moon."

DW: The prophetic moon.

MS: It keeps transferring.

DW: Prophetic! And the phases of the moon are there: half moon, full moon, quarter moon . . .

MS: Wow.

DW: "I saw thy change begun!"

MS: Full moon, half moon, quarter moon, time passing . . .

DW: All the phases you will go through . . . When you read Crane, you come across Eliot and Pound. What do you do?

MS: What do you mean?

DW: Well, what does one do? Coming across Crane coming across Eliot and Pound?

MS: Well, Crane had so much trouble with Eliot. That was his most problematic influence, I think you could say. Eliot did not go down easy for him, like Whitman and Dickinson did. But I don't know what I'd do when . . .

DW: In terms of poetic theory . . . contrasting the two of them.

MS: Well, Crane is always championing the positive affirmation. Crane is praise, and Eliot is melancholy, negativity, pessimism . . .

DW: No, but in terms of . . . that may be true, but in terms of the *technique* . . . what is there in Crane practically that is not there in Eliot?

MS: Meter, lots of iambs . . .

DW: Okay, if you stay on meter alone, what is the argument, on both sides?

MS: I don't know, I've always had trouble with meter.

DW: Because you're an American.

MS: I don't know what it is.

DW: No, that's what it is. It sounds forced to you because it's not William Carlos Williams, it's not free verse.

MS: Right, right. I remember in high school I had to go to my English teacher and stay after class and have her teach me how to scan lines. We're not taught meter. We don't have to talk about this because . . .

DW: Yes, we have to because it's essential. In other words, the meter of Crane was wrong for Pound and Eliot. Am I correct?

MS: I think so, because they championed free verse.

DW: Wrong!

MS: No?

DW: What did they not champion?

MS: Anachronism, maybe. Did they find Crane anachronistic with his meter?

DW: What is that meter?

MS: Um. Blank verse. He did lots of blank verse.

DW: Right. Pentameter.

MS: But what did Eliot and Pound have against blank verse?

DW: Pound said, "To break the pentameter, that was the first heave."

MS: What does he mean by that?

DW: The first thing we have to do is get rid of the pentameter. To ditch the pentameter. "That was the first heave." So who was he talking about?

MS: Well he's talking about himself, his own generation, William Carlos Williams . . .

DW: But what did he say? Why was that *heave*? Where does it come from?

MS: It comes from the natural rhythm of the English language. People say that we naturally talk in iambic pentameter.

DW: Right. You just did one. "We naturally talk in iambic pentameter." We do.

MS: The only way I was able to begin hearing inflections and patterns in English was by learning French. And hearing my English speech patterns fucking up my French. That's the only way I figured out how to hear it.

DW: Well, all of Victorian verse is pentameter.

MS: And that's what Pound hated. He thought that it was "rotten."

DW: Certainly in their time, the popular meter was Elizabethan. So it was something to be warned against. Right?

MS: Yeah. So what you're saying is that Crane, he didn't follow the rules. Cause he continued in that tradition.

DW: He absolutely *ignored* the rules. So what did he replace it with?

MS: Replace it with?

DW: You know what, *more* pentameter.

MS: He turned it up a notch.

DW: Yeah, he went up. "That's bullshit, listen to this." He would then do the equivalent of quotations from Marlowe and the Elizabethans.

MS: It's like your poem "Ruins of a Great House." That poem is all built on quotations and allusions.

DW: But you have to get this very right. The people who are writing very well . . . Thomas Hardy, right? Hardy was pentametrical, too. And certainly Browning. Isn't Hart Crane from the fucking Midwest?

MS: Ohio.

DW: Who *cares* about a kid from the Midwest writing pentameter? It's stupid. Isn't it stupid?

MS: It's bizarre.

DW: Exactly. That's the same thing as stupid, you're just using a fancy word. But all that proves is that you can't fuck around with genius. That's what he is. And a phenomenal genius because he was gifted.

MS: A prodigy.

DW: Yeah, in a way he was a prodigy, too. And he's really stubborn, because he writes a whole book, *The Bridge*, in that meter. *The Bridge* and *The Wasteland* and Pound—same period.

MS: Why do you think so many people thought *The Bridge* was a failure?

DW: A failure? No, no.

MS: No, I don't think so, but that was the initial response.

DW: Well, what you had was William Carlos Williams saying free verse is "American" verse. Everybody else said that this is "American" verse too. And Crane said . . . he was a drunk, eh?

MS: Yeah, you can't do that anymore.

DW: Huh?

MS: You can't be a rockstar like that anymore.

DW: *[Laughs]* Right. But I think a part of the persistence and the stubbornness had to do with being a drunk, too.

MS: Yeah. Cause he wrote drunk, too.

DW: But it's bullshit. You can't write drunk. I once tried it. You ever tried it?

MS: No.

DW: Forget it.

MS: Who wants to write drunk? You want to go out and party.

DW: It was an experiment. I said I'm gonna have six beers and write this masterpiece.

MS: *[Laughs]*

DW: Total shit. But you would think the impulse for great creativity would come from either alcohol or drugs.

MS: That pitch Crane lived on was always at the highest pitch of ecstasy. He was a poet of ecstasy and excess. So he needed the libations, the music.

DW: But the truth is that the poems *are* ecstatic.

MS: I totally agree.

DW: And when they're no good they don't make any sense. There are reams of Crane that don't make any sense at all because he's writing drunk.

MS: There's some people who say that Crane only wrote good lines, because when you look at a poem as a whole there are passages that . . .

DW: You can't read *The Bridge* and say he didn't write good poems. There are parts of Crane that are as good as American prose, you know, the railroad squatters talking in "The River." That is great prose stuff.

MS: Yeah, the hobos and stuff . . . there's this line about them, "Holding to childhood like some termless play," as if childhood could go on forever.

DW: I think he has to be seen as individualistic.

MS: I agree. He doesn't fit into the canon very well.

DW: Also, you ever learn pentameter by heart?

MS: Like lines of pentameter? No.

DW: It's a great kick. Because the meter, like from Marlowe, "Those walled garrisons will I subdue, / And write myself great lord of Africa . . ."

MS: Mhm, right. *[Laughs]*

DW: Fuck me . . . imagine an actor saying that. And even . . . [says something in Latin]—"O, run slowly, slowly, horses of the night!" Crane loved that sound! But that's because he was from the Midwest, the middle of nowhere *[laughs]*.

MS: He was from the middle of nowhere, so he could do whatever he wanted!

DW: No, I think it's a tremendous love that he had for the Elizabethans.

MS: He loved the language that was just . . . "over the top" isn't the right phrase, but exuberant . . .

DW: What I want you to do for your homework: Reread "The River" tonight. Really read it. You'll see how it does these great things.

MS: It's funny how you talk about "The River" because to be honest it was never my favorite passage.

DW: Really?

MS: "The Dance" with Pocahontas, and then "To Brooklyn Bridge," but I'll reread "The River," yes. Has this line ever meant anything to you? "Imponderable the dinosaur sinks slow . . ." that's one of the weirdest things in Crane's poetry.

DW: What do you find weird about it?

MS: I don't understand any of it.

DW: It's an image of the thing coming out of the mud. You know it.

MS: Oh, as if he's comparing Cape Hatteras to a dinosaur.

DW: It seems straight to me. "Imponderable the dinosaur," that's okay.

MS: Yeah, okay, okay.

DW: Can't believe it . . .!

MS: And then it's sinking into the sand . . . okay.

DW: Yeah . . . See, this can be bad Crane, you know? There's a lot of *[makes yucky sound]*, right? But the contrast is, when it hits . . .

MS: Because, he's always swinging for the fences, and sometimes you strike out . . .

DW: Almost too often.

MS: *[Laughs]*

DW: No, really. Making a big hit of the line. He had examples . . . I was teaching it the other day, not Crane, Elizabethan poetry, *Doctor Faustus*, "See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!" And then Helen appears to Faust . . . I'm doing Marlowe now, not Crane. But what you'll see is when the line comes out as Marlowe, it's also like Crane, and he tried for that because he was capable of doing it as if he were Marlowe . . . when Faust sees Helen, what does he say?

MS: I don't know.

DW: Everybody knows it: In astonishment at her beauty, he says what? He says, "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?"

MS: Of course, yeah, yeah . . . Kind of like St. Lucia, fought over twelve times between the French and the English, the "Helen of the West Indies . . ."

DW: *[Laughs]* The next line is: "And burnt the topless towers of Illium?" but do you hear that echoing in Crane? That's what Crane is going for . . .

MS: You can hear the pentameter very easily there.

DW: And of course, famous lines are like, "See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!" Faustus says that. Like at a sunset . . . Well, I'm extremely pleased that you know your Crane so well.

MS: Thank you.

DW: You teach him?

MS: No. I mean, I'm 26 years old, I just finished my degree.

DW: You know what I do in class? Joseph Brodsky used to do it, too.

MS: What?

DW: Get the class to recite. You ever do that?

MS: No. That's so important though. It's like you're talking about with Shakespeare, to hear the meter. But what I'm trying to do right now is, you know, I'm teaching in Martinique, but then I also write book reviews for this literary magazine back in the states called *Rain Taxi*. But then I'm just trying to write poems while I'm over here.

DW: Tell me this:

> "Elle est retrouveé.
> Quoi?—L'Éternité.

C'est la mer alleé
Avec le soleil."

MS: Rimbaud.

DW: Isn't that something? Jesus. Oh, oh, oh!

MS: Exactly. Oh my god. *Le Bateau Ivre*, it gives me shivers just thinking about it. I found the best translation of *Le Bateau Ivre* a couple months ago.

DW: By whom?

MS: I don't even know, I should probably know, but it translates Rimbaud into a contemporary vernacular idioms:

"I followed deadpan Rivers down and down,
And knew my haulers had let go the ropes.
Whooping redskins took my men as targets
And nailed them nude to technicolor posts."

DW: But what is the French?

MS: I don't remember it. Uh, I have no idea. That'd be a lot to memorize: *The Drunken Boat* in French. That'd be a task.

DW: Has there been a reassessment of Hart Crane in American literature? Or people don't read him?

MS: No, people . . . when he killed himself, that was when his reputation was probably at its lowest. It has definitely been rising. I've heard one critic say that Crane constantly needs to be reintroduced, he constantly needs to be defended, it's just like this perpetual thing, like the myth of Sisyphus . . . but yes, he's in the syllabi, he's being taught.

DW: Americans are not brought up with meter. They're not brought up with poetry. If you try to get them to recite, they're too embarrassed.

MS: It's true, I remember.

DW: On the other hand, when you get a class reciting some great poems, it'll tear your heart out.

MS: Did you have moments like that in Boston?

DW: Oh yeah, all the time. That's why I'd do it. One I do all the time is Hardy or good Auden. You read Auden?

MS: Yeah, yeah.

DW: So who do you read today?

DW: Well, when I realized I was going off to Martinique, I thought, okay, what books am I bringing? How can I figure out the Caribbean? So I brought your Selected Poems, and I brought Robert Pinsky, and oh, Theodore Roethke, did you ever read Roethke?

DW: Yeah.

SN: Roethke, r-o-e-t-h-k-e?

MS: Yeah, strange last name, very Polish, very German.

SN: Any more wine? What are we doing now?

DW: Let's talk.

SN: I didn't go swimming. I didn't do my exercises.

MS: No? I've skipped the past two weeks, too. It's the holidays.

SN: I know. My excuse, too.

DW: How would you like to go and eat? All of us.

SN: At the marina? We can go to the marina.

DW: It's open?

SN: Yeah. It's open at 6 o'clock. You know the marina?

MS: No, no.

SN: That's our hangout, down the road.

DW: I wanna go like this then.

SN: You're going like that, yeah.

DW: Should we call Peter?

SN: Uh, I can call him.

DW: Should we invite him?

SN: If he wants to. But he probably won't want to. It's a little late.

DW: What time is it right now?

SN: It's almost 6:30.

DW: This guy is very bright *[pointing to me]*.

SN: Is he bright?

DW: Very bright.

SN: Not only good looking, he's bright, too? He's blushing, that's cute.

DW: Otherwise he's the usual North Dakotan idiot.

SN: North Dakota? Or North Carolina?

MS: North Dakota, yeah.

SN: You're from North Dakota?? Where, Fargo?

MS: Close, Grand Forks.

DW: Fargo?

MS: No, not Fargo.

SN: You know that movie? You know Frances McDormand? She was a student of Derek's.

MS: Wait, what?

SN: Yeah, she's great. She's married to a Cohen.

MS: She's in a lot of their movies.

SN: She was a student of his in a play at Yale.

MS: Wow.

DW: Sweetheart, I'm getting hungry. Let's call Peter and come back.

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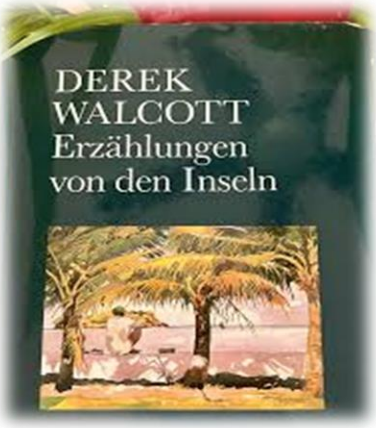

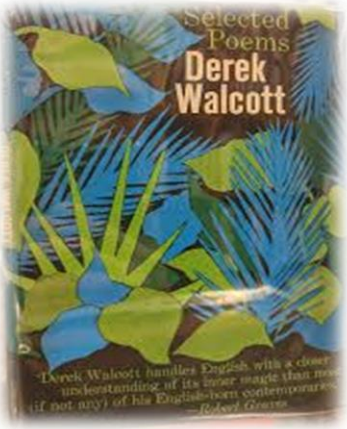

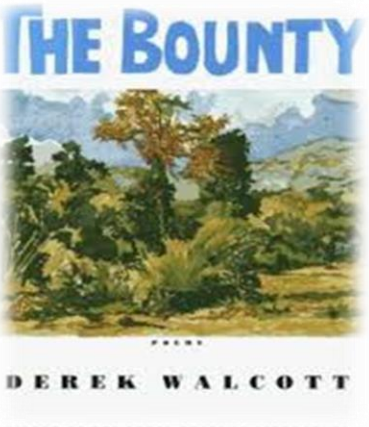

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5 Aug 2019

Toni Morrison

Nobel Prize in Literature 1993

Born: 18 February 1931, Lorain, OH, USA
Died: 5 August 2019, New York, NY, USA
Residence at the time of the award: USA

Prize motivation:

"who in novels characterized by visionary
force and poetic import, gives life to
an essential aspect of American reality"

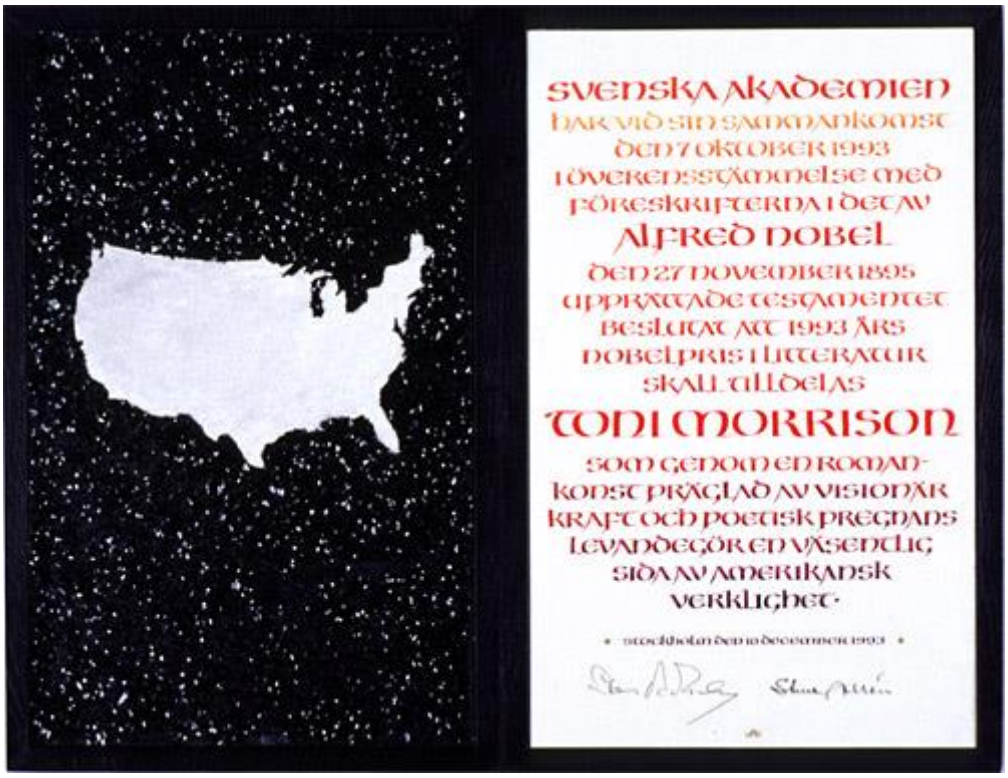
Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/facts/}

Links to other sites

On Toni Morrison from Pegasos Author's Calendar

Nobel Diploma

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/diploma/



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Award Ceremony Speech

Speech by Professor Sture Allén,
Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy

Translation from the Swedish text

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Nobel Prize awarded by the Swedish Academy is, as we know, a literary prize. This year it has been granted to Toni

Morrison, making her the ninetieth Nobel Laureate in Literature.

In her volume of essays, *Playing in the Dark*, Miss Morrison lucidly pictures the insights that she has gained, as an author and a reader in her native country: "It is as if I had been looking at a fishbowl – the glide and flick of the golden scales, the green tip, the bolt of white careening back from the gills; the castles at the bottom, surrounded by pebbles and tiny, intricate fronds of green; the barely disturbed water, the flecks of waste and food, the tranquil bubbles travelling to the surface – and suddenly I saw the bowl, the structure that transparently (and invisibly) permits the ordered life it contains to exist in the larger world." In other words, she regards the African presence in her country as a vital but unarticulated prerequisite for the fulfilment of the American dream. Similarly, she sees whiteness in literature as having blackness as its constant companion, the racial other as its shadow.

In her depictions of the world of the black people, in life as in legend, Toni Morrison has given the Afro-American people their history back, piece by piece. In this perspective, her work is uncommonly consonant. At the same time, it is richly variegated. The reader derives vast pleasure from her superb narrative technique, shifting from novel to novel and marked by original development, although it is related to Faulkner and to the Latin American tradition. Toni Morrison's novels invite the reader to partake at many levels, and at varying degrees of complexity. Still, the most enduring impression they leave is of empathy, compassion with one's fellow human beings.

Milkman Dead, the protagonist of *Song of Solomon*, reflects one of the basic themes of Miss Morrison's novels, in his quest for self. Milkman's paternal grandfather was a liberated slave. When he was registering his freedom, he responded to a question about his father with the word "Dead", thus acquiring his macabre surname from the drunken official who asked. His family was prepared to accept this name: "It was new and would wipe out the past. Wipe it all out." The Solomon whose name occurs in the title of the novel, Milkman's peculiar southern forefather, was to be found even in the song that went with children's games. The intensity of his inner life had carried him through the air back to the Africa of his origins. Solomon's rapture was ultimately Milkman's as well.

Motifs in space and time continue to be interwoven in *Beloved*. Paradoxically, the combination of realism and folklore enhances the novel's credibility. In the world which the female protagonist, Sethe, inhabits, one does not possess one's own body. There is tremendous power in Toni Morrison's description of Sethe's act of releasing her child, Beloved, from the destiny she imagines her facing, and of the consequences of this act for her own life, in which Beloved's double personifies the burden of Sethe's guilt.

In her latest novel, *Jazz*, Toni Morrison's approach is similar to the style in which jazz is performed. The opening lines of the novel state its theme, the lives of a number of people in Harlem in the 1920s. In the course of the novel we perceive a first-person narrator, varying, supplementing and intensifying the story. The final picture is a highly composite image of events, characters and atmospheres, mediated in sensual language with a deep inherent sense of musicality. Toni Morrison's way of addressing her reader has a compelling lustre, in a poetic direction.

When she was very young, her family's landlord set fire to the house in which they lived when her parents fell behind with the rent. And while they were in it. Her family reacted to this absurd form of crudeness, monumental crudeness, not with resignation but with laughter. This, says Toni Morrison, is how you can distance yourself from the act and take your life back. You take your integrity back.

In great minds, gravity and humour are close neighbours. This is reflected in everything Toni Morrison has written, and evidenced in her own summary: "My project rises from delight, not disappointment."

Dear Miss Morrison,
I have just told the audience that, in your own words, your project rises from delight, not disappointment. As you disclose fundamental aspects of hidden reality, you make gravity and humour abide side by side in your remarkable work, with its verbal music. It is my privilege and pleasure, on behalf of the Swedish Academy, to convey to you our warmest congratulations on the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1993, and to invite you to receive the Prize from the hands of His Majesty the King.

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Nobel Prize Lecture

Nobel Lecture December 7, 1993

Listen to an audio recording of Toni Morrison's Nobel Lecture

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"Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind but wise." Or was it an old man? A guru, perhaps. Or a griot soothing restless child. I have heard this story, or one exactly like it, in the lore of several cultures.

"Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind. Wise."

In the version I know the woman is the daughter of slaves, black, American, and lives alone in a small house outside of town. Her reputation for wisdom is without peer and without question. Among her people she is both the law and its transgression. The honor she is paid and the awe in which she is held reach beyond her neighborhood to places far away; to the city where the intelligence of rural prophets is the source of much amusement.

One day the woman is visited by some young people who seem to be bent on disproving her clairvoyance and showing her up for the fraud they believe she is. Their plan is simple: they enter her house and ask the one question the answer to which rides solely on her difference from them, a difference they regard as a profound disability: her blindness. They stand before her, and one of them says, "Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead."

She does not answer, and the question is repeated. "Is the bird I am holding living or dead?"

Still she doesn't answer. She is blind and cannot see her visitors, let alone what is in their hands. She does not know their color, gender or homeland. She only knows their motive.

The old woman's silence is so long, the young people have trouble holding their laughter.

Finally she speaks and her voice is soft but stern. "I don't know", she says. "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands."

Her answer can be taken to mean: if it is dead, you have either found it that way or you have killed it. If it is alive, you can still kill it. Whether it is to stay alive, it is your decision. Whatever the case, it is your responsibility.

For parading their power and her helplessness, the young visitors are reprimanded, told they are responsible not only for the act of mockery but also for the small bundle of life sacrificed to achieve its aims. The blind woman shifts attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised.

Speculation on what (other than its own frail body) that bird-in-the-hand might signify has always been attractive to me, but especially so now thinking, as I have been, about the work I do that has brought me to this company. So I choose to read the bird as language and the woman as a practiced writer. She is worried about how the language she dreams in, given to her at birth, is handled, put into service, even withheld from her for certain nefarious purposes. Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency – as an act with consequences. So the question the children put to her: "Is it living or dead?" is not unreal because she thinks of language as susceptible to death, erasure; certainly imperiled and salvageable only by an effort of the will. She believes that if the bird in the hands of her visitors is dead the custodians are responsible for the corpse. For her a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring. Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. However moribund, it is not without effect for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, suppresses human potential. Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, fill baffling silences. Official language smitheryed to sanction ignorance and preserve privilege is a suit of armor polished to shocking glitter, a husk from which the knight departed long ago. Yet there it is: dumb, predatory, sentimental. Exciting reverence in schoolchildren, providing shelter for despots, summoning false memories of stability, harmony among the public.

She is convinced that when language dies, out of carelessness, disuse, indifference and absence of esteem, or killed by fiat, not only she herself, but all users and makers are accountable for its demise. In her country children have bitten their tongues off and use bullets instead to iterate the voice of speechlessness, of disabled and disabling language, of language adults have abandoned altogether as a device for grappling with meaning, providing guidance, or expressing love. But she knows tongue-suicide is not only the choice of children. It is common among the infantile heads of state and power merchants whose evacuated language leaves them with no access to what is left of their human instincts for they speak only to those who obey, or in order to force obedience.

The systematic looting of language can be recognized by the tendency of its users to forgo its nuanced, complex, mid-wifery properties for menace and subjugation. Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science;

whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek – it must be rejected, altered and exposed. It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed-out mind. Sexist language, racist language, theistic language – all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas.

The old woman is keenly aware that no intellectual mercenary, nor insatiable dictator, no paid-for politician or demagogue; no counterfeit journalist would be persuaded by her thoughts. There is and will be rousing language to keep citizens armed and arming; slaughtered and slaughtering in the malls, courthouses, post offices, playgrounds, bedrooms and boulevards; stirring, memorializing language to mask the pity and waste of needless death. There will be more diplomatic language to countenance rape, torture, assassination. There is and will be more seductive, mutant language designed to throttle women, to pack their throats like paté-producing geese with their own unsayable, transgressive words; there will be more of the language of surveillance disguised as research; of politics and history calculated to render the suffering of millions mute; language glamorized to thrill the dissatisfied and bereft into assaulting their neighbors; arrogant pseudo-empirical language crafted to lock creative people into cages of inferiority and hopelessness.

Underneath the eloquence, the glamor, the scholarly associations, however stirring or seductive, the heart of such language is languishing, or perhaps not beating at all – if the bird is already dead.

She has thought about what could have been the intellectual history of any discipline if it had not insisted upon, or been forced into, the waste of time and life that rationalizations for and representations of dominance required – lethal discourses of exclusion blocking access to cognition for both the excluder and the excluded.

The conventional wisdom of the Tower of Babel story is that the collapse was a misfortune. That it was the distraction, or the weight of many languages that precipitated the tower's failed architecture. That one monolithic language would have expedited the building and heaven would have been reached. Whose heaven, she wonders? And what kind? Perhaps the achievement of Paradise was premature, a little hasty if no one could take the time to understand other languages, other views, other narratives period. Had they, the heaven they imagined might have been found at their feet. Complicated, demanding, yes, but a view of heaven as life; not heaven as post-life.

She would not want to leave her young visitors with the impression that language should be forced to stay alive merely to be. The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers. Although its poise is sometimes in displacing experience it is not a substitute for it. It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie. When a President of the United States thought about the graveyard his country had become, and said, "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here. But it will never forget what they did here," his simple words are exhilarating in their life-sustaining properties because they refused

to encapsulate the reality of 600, 000 dead men in a cataclysmic race war. Refusing to monumentalize, disdaining the "final word", the precise "summing up", acknowledging their "poor power to add or detract", his words signal deference to the uncapturability of the life it mourns. It is the deference that moves her, that recognition that language can never live up to life once and for all. Nor should it. Language can never "pin down" slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable.

Be it grand or slender, burrowing, blasting, or refusing to sanctify; whether it laughs out loud or is a cry without an alphabet, the choice word, the chosen silence, unmolested language surges toward knowledge, not its destruction. But who does not know of literature banned because it is interrogative; discredited because it is critical; erased because alternate? And how many are outraged by the thought of a self-ravaged tongue?

Word-work is sublime, she thinks, because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference – the way in which we are like no other life.

We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.

"Once upon a time, …" visitors ask an old woman a question. Who are they, these children? What did they make of that encounter? What did they hear in those final words: "The bird is in your hands"? A sentence that gestures towards possibility or one that drops a latch? Perhaps what the children heard was "It's not my problem. I am old, female, black, blind. What wisdom I have now is in knowing I cannot help you. The future of language is yours."

They stand there. Suppose nothing was in their hands? Suppose the visit was only a ruse, a trick to get to be spoken to, taken seriously as they have not been before? A chance to interrupt, to violate the adult world, its miasma of discourse about them, for them, but never to them? Urgent questions are at stake, including the one they have asked: "Is the bird we hold living or dead?" Perhaps the question meant: "Could someone tell us what is life? What is death?" No trick at all; no silliness. A straightforward question worthy of the attention of a wise one. An old one. And if the old and wise who have lived life and faced death cannot describe either, who can?

But she does not; she keeps her secret; her good opinion of herself; her gnomic pronouncements; her art without commitment. She keeps her distance, enforces it and retreats into the singularity of isolation, in sophisticated, privileged space.

Nothing, no word follows her declaration of transfer. That silence is deep, deeper than the meaning available in the words she has spoken. It shivers, this silence, and the children, annoyed, fill it with language invented on the spot.

"Is there no speech," they ask her, "no words you can give us that helps us break through your dossier of failures? Through the education you have just given us that is no education at all because we are paying close attention to what you have done as well as to what you have said? To the barrier you have erected between generosity and wisdom?

"We have no bird in our hands, living or dead. We have only you and our important question. Is the nothing in our hands something you could not bear to contemplate, to even guess? Don't you remember being young when language was magic without meaning? When what you could say, could not mean? When the invisible was what imagination strove to see? When questions and demands for answers burned so brightly you trembled with fury at not knowing?

"Do we have to begin consciousness with a battle heroines and heroes like you have already fought and lost leaving us with nothing in our hands except what you have imagined is there? Your answer is artful, but its artfulness embarrasses us and ought to embarrass you. Your answer is indecent in its self-congratulation. A made-for-television script that makes no sense if there is nothing in our hands.

"Why didn't you reach out, touch us with your soft fingers, delay the sound bite, the lesson, until you knew who we were? Did you so despise our trick, our modus operandi you could not see that we were baffled about how to get your attention? We are young. Unripe. We have heard all our short lives that we have to be responsible. What could that possibly mean in the catastrophe this world has become; where, as a poet said, "nothing needs to be exposed since it is already barefaced." Our inheritance is an affront. You want us to have your old, blank eyes and see only cruelty and mediocrity. Do you think we are stupid enough to perjure ourselves again and again with the fiction of nationhood? How dare you talk to us of duty when we stand waist deep in the toxin of your past?

"You trivialize us and trivialize the bird that is not in our hands. Is there no context for our lives? No song, no literature, no poem full of vitamins, no history connected to experience that you can pass along to help us start strong? You are an adult. The old one, the wise one. Stop thinking about saving your face. Think of our lives and tell us your particularized world. Make up a story. Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created. We will not blame you if your reach exceeds your grasp; if love so ignites your words they go down in flames and nothing is left but their scald. Or if, with the reticence of a surgeon's hands, your words suture only the places where blood might flow. We know you can never do it properly – once and for all. Passion is never enough; neither is skill. But try. For our sake and yours forget your name in the street; tell us what the world has been to you in the dark places and in the light. Don't tell us what to believe, what to fear. Show us belief's wide skirt and the stitch that unravels fear's caul. You, old woman, blessed with blindness, can speak the language that tells us what only language can: how to see without pictures. Language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names. Language alone is meditation.

"Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin. What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from

the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company.

"Tell us about ships turned away from shorelines at Easter, placenta in a field. Tell us about a wagonload of slaves, how they sang so softly their breath was indistinguishable from the falling snow. How they knew from the hunch of the nearest shoulder that the next stop would be their last. How, with hands prayered in their sex, they thought of heat, then sun. Lifting their faces as though it was there for the taking. Turning as though there for the taking. They stop at an inn. The driver and his mate go in with the lamp leaving them humming in the dark. The horse's void steams into the snow beneath its hooves and its hiss and melt are the envy of the freezing slaves.

"The inn door opens: a girl and a boy step away from its light. They climb into the wagon bed. The boy will have a gun in three years, but now he carries a lamp and a jug of warm cider. They pass it from mouth to mouth. The girl offers bread, pieces of meat and something more: a glance into the eyes of the one she serves. One helping for each man, two for each woman. And a look. They look back. The next stop will be their last. But not this one. This one is warmed."

It's quiet again when the children finish speaking, until the woman breaks into the silence.

"Finally", she says, "I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done – together."

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Banquet Speech

Toni Morrison delivering her speech.

Toni Morrison's speech at the Nobel Banquet,

December 10, 1993

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I entered this hall pleasantly haunted by those who have entered it before me. That company of Laureates is both daunting and welcoming, for among its lists are names of persons whose work has made whole worlds available to me. The sweep and specificity of their art have sometimes broken my heart with the courage and clarity of its vision. The astonishing brilliance with which they practiced their craft has challenged and nurtured my own. My debt to them rivals the profound one I owe to the Swedish Academy for having selected me to join those distinguished alumnae.

Early in October an artist friend left a message which I kept on the answering service for weeks and played back every once in a while, just to hear the trembling pleasure in her voice and the faith in her words. "My dear sister," she said, "the prize that is yours is also ours and could not have been placed in better hands." The spirit of her message with its earned optimism and sublime trust marks this day for me.

I will leave this hall, however, with a new and much more delightful haunting than the one I felt upon entering: that is the company of Laureates yet to come. Those who, even as I speak, are mining, sifting and polishing languages for illuminations none of us has dreamed of. But whether or not any one of them secures a place in this pantheon, the gathering of these writers is unmistakable and mounting. Their voices bespeak civilizations gone and yet to be; the precipice from which their imaginations gaze will rivet us; they do not blink nor turn away.

It is, therefore, mindful of the gifts of my predecessors, the blessing of my sisters, in joyful anticipation of writers to come that I accept the honour the Swedish Academy has done me, and ask you to share what is for me a moment of grace.

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Prose

Excerpt from *Sula*

Excerpts selected by the Nobel Library of the Swedish Academy.
(Pages 56-57 and 134-137)

Then summer came. A summer limp with the weight of blossomed things. Heavy sunflowers weeping over fences; iris curling and browning at the edges far away from their purple hearts; ears of corn letting their auburn hair wind down to their stalks. And the boys. The beautiful, beautiful boys who dotted the landscape like jewels, split the air with their shouts in the field, and thickened the river with their shining wet backs. Even their footsteps left a smell of smoke behind.

It was in that summer, the summer of their twelfth year, the summer of the beautiful black boys, that they became skittish, frightened and bold — all at the same time.

In that mercury mood in July, Sula and Nel wandered about the Bottom barefoot looking for mischief. They decided to go down by the river where the boys sometimes swam. Nel waited on the porch of 7 Carpenter's Road while Sula ran into the house to go to the toilet. On the way up the stairs, she passed the kitchen where Hannah sat with two friends, Patsy and Valentine. The two women were fanning themselves and watching Hannah put down some dough, all talking casually about one thing and another, and had gotten around, when Sula passed by, to the problems of child rearing.

"They a pain."

"Yeh. Wish I'd listened to mamma. She told me not to have 'em too soon."

"Any time atall is too soon for me."

"Oh, I don't know. My Rudy minds his daddy. He just wild with me. Be glad when he growed and gone."

Hannah smiled and said, "Shut your mouth. You love the ground he pee on."

"Sure I do. But he still a pain. Can't help loving your own child. No matter what they do."

"Well, Hester grown now and I can't say love is exactly what I feel."

"Sure you do. You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference."

"Guess so. Likin' them is another thing."

"Sure. They different people, you know …"

She only heard Hannah's words, and the pronouncement sent her flying up the stairs. In bewilderment, she stood at the window fingering the curtain edge, aware of a sting in her eye. Nel's call floated up and into the window, pulling her away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight.

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Every now and then she looked around for tangible evidence of his having ever been there. Where were the butterflies? the blueberries? the whistling reed? She could find nothing, for he had left nothing but his stunning absence. An absence so decorative, so ornate, it was difficult for her to understand how she had ever endured, without falling dead or being consumed, his magnificent presence.

The mirror by the door was not a mirror by the door, it was an altar where he stood for only a moment to put on his cap before going out. The red rocking chair was a rocking of his own hips as he sat in the kitchen. Still, there was nothing of his — his own — that she could find. It was as if she were afraid she had hallucinated him and needed proof to the contrary. His absence was everywhere, stinging everything, giving the furnishings primary colors, sharp outlines to the corners of rooms and gold light to the dust collecting on table tops. When he was there he pulled everything toward himself. Not only her eyes and all her senses but also inanimate things seemed to exist because of him, backdrops to his presence. Now that he had gone, these things, so long subdued by his presence, were glamorized in his wake.

Then one day, burrowing in a dresser drawer, she found what she had been looking for: proof that he had been there, his driver's license. It contained just what she needed for verification — his vital statistics: Born 1901, height 5'11", weight 152 lbs., eyes brown, hair black, color black. Oh yes, skin black. Very black. So black that only a steady careful rubbing with steel wool would remove it, and as it was removed there was the glint of gold

leaf and under the gold leaf the cold alabaster and deep, deep down under the cold alabaster more black only this time the black of warm loam.

But what was this? Albert Jacks? His name was Albert Jacks? A. Jacks. She had thought it was Ajax. All those years. Even from the time she walked by the pool hall and looked away from him sitting astride a wooden chair, looked away to keep from seeing the wide space of intolerable orderliness between his legs; the openness that held no sign, no sign at all, of the animal that lurked in his trousers; looked away from the insolent nostrils and the smile that kept slipping and falling, falling, falling so she wanted to reach out with her hand to catch it before it fell to the pavement and was sullied by the cigarette butts and bottle caps and spittle at his feet and the feet of other men who sat or stood around outside the pool hall, calling, singing out to her and Nel and grown women too with lyrics like *pig meat* and *brown sugar* and *jailbait* and *O Lord, what have I done to deserve the wrath*, and *Take me, Jesus, I have seen the promised land*, and *Do, Lord, remember me* in voices mellowed by hopeless passion into gentleness. Even then, when she and Nel were trying hard not to dream of him and not to think of him when they touched the softness in their underwear or undid their braids as soon as they left home to let the hair bump and wave around their ears, or wrapped the cotton binding around their chests so the nipples would not break through their blouses and give him cause to smile his slipping, falling smile, which brought the blood rushing to their skin. And even later, when for the first time in her life she had lain in bed with a man and said his name involuntarily or said it truly meaning *him*, the name she was screaming and saying was not his at all.
Sula stood with a worn slip of paper in her fingers and said aloud to no one, "I didn't even know his name. And if I didn't know his name, then there is nothing I did know and I have known nothing ever at all since the one thing I wanted was to know his name so how could he help but leave me since he was making love to a woman who didn't even know his name.

"When I was a little girl the heads of my paper dolls came off, and it was a long time before I discovered that my own head would not fall off if I bent my neck. I used to walk around holding it very stiff because I thought a strong wind or a heavy push would snap my neck. Nel was the one who told me the truth. But she was wrong. I did not hold my head stiff enough when I met him and so I lost it just like the dolls.

"It's just as well he left. Soon I would have torn the flesh from his face just to see if I was right about the gold and nobody would have understood that kind of curiosity. They would have believed that I wanted to hurt him just like the little boy who fell down the steps and broke his leg and the people think I pushed him just because I looked at it."

Holding the driver's license she crawled into bed and fell into a sleep full of dreams of cobalt blue.

When she awoke, there was a melody in her head she could not identify or recall ever hearing before. "Perhaps I made it up," she thought. Then it came to her — the name of the song and all its lyrics just as she had heard it many times before. She sat on the edge of the bed thinking, "There aren't any more new songs and I have sung all the ones there are. I have sung them all. I have sung all the songs there are." She lay down again on the bed and sang a little wandering tune made up of the words *I have sung all the songs all the songs I have sung all the songs there are* until, touched by her own lullaby, she grew drowsy, and in the hollow of near-sleep she tasted the acridness of gold, left the chill of alabaster and smelled the dark, sweet stench of loam.

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Press Release

Swedish Academy
The Permanent Secretary

Press release
October 7, 1993

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1993
Toni Morrison

"who, in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality."

"My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world". These are the words of this year's Nobel Laureate in Literature, the American writer Toni Morrison, in her book of essays "Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination" (1992). And she adds, "My project rises from delight, not disappointment …"

Toni Morrison is 62 years old, and was born in Lorain, Ohio, in the United States. Her works comprise novels and essays. In her academic career she is a professor in the humanities at the University of Princeton, New Jersey.

She has written six novels, each of them of great interest. Her oeuvre is unusually finely wrought and cohesive, yet at the same time rich in variation. One can delight in her unique narrative technique, varying from book to book and developed independently, even though its roots stem from Faulkner and American writers from further south. The lasting impression is nevertheless sympathy, humanity, of the kind which is always based on profound humour.

"Song of Solomon" (1978) with its description of the black world in life and legend, forms an excellent introduction to the work of Toni Morrison. Milkman Dead's quest for his real self and its source reflects a basic theme in the novels. The Solomon of the title, the southern ancestor, was to be found in the songs of childhood games. His inner intensity had borne him back, like Icarus, through the air to the Africa of his roots. This insight finally becomes Milkman's too.

"Beloved" (1987) continues to widen the themes and to weave together the places and times in the network of motifs. The combination of realistic notation and folklore paradoxically intensifies the credibility. There is enormous power in the depiction of Sethe's action to liberate her child from the life she envisages for it, and the consequences of this action for Sethe's own life.

In her latest novel "Jazz" (1992), Toni Morrison uses a device which is akin to the way jazz itself is played. The book's first lines provide a synopsis, and in reading the novel one becomes aware of a narrator who varies,

embellishes and intensifies. The result is a richly complex, sensuously conveyed image of the events, the characters and moods.

As the motivation for the award implies, Toni Morrison is a literary artist of the first rank. She delves into the language itself, a language she wants to liberate from the fetters of race. And she addresses us with the lustre of poetry.

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Awards

- 1975: Ohioana Book Award for *Sula*
- 1977: National Book Critics Circle Award for *Song of Solomon*
- 1977: American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award
- 1981: Langston Hughes Medal, City College of New York
- 1982: Ohio Women's Hall of Fame inductee
- 1986: New York State Governor's Arts Award
- 1988: Robert F. Kennedy Book Award
- 1988: Helmerich Award
- 1988: American Book Award for *Beloved*
- 1988: Anisfield-Wolf Book Award in Race Relations for *Beloved*
- 1988: Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *Beloved*
- 1988: Frederic G. Melcher Book Award for *Beloved*
- 1988: Honorary Doctor of Laws at University of Pennsylvania
- 1989: Honorary Doctor of Letters at Harvard University
- 1993: Nobel Prize in Literature
- 1993: Commander of the Arts and Letters, Paris
- 1994: Condorcet Medal, Paris
- 1994: Rhegium Julii Prize for Literature
- 1995: Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Howard University
- 1996: Jefferson Lecture
- 1996: National Book Foundation's Medal of Distinguished Contribution to American Letters
- 1997: Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Gustavus Adolphus College.
- 1998: Audie Award for Narration by the Author for *Sula*
- 2000: National Humanities Medal
- 2002: 100 Greatest African Americans, list by Molefi Kete Asante
- 2005: Golden Plate Award of the American Academy of Achievement
- 2005: Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Oxford
- 2005: Coretta Scott King Award for *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*

- 2008: New Jersey Hall of Fame inductee
- 2009: Norman Mailer Prize, Lifetime Achievement
- 2010: Officier de la Légion d'Honneur
- 2010: Institute for Arts and Humanities Medal for Distinguished Contributions to the Arts and Humanities from the Pennsylvania State University
- 2011: Library of Congress Creative Achievement Award for Fiction
- 2011: Honorary Doctor of Letters at Rutgers University Graduation Commencement
- 2011: Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Geneva
- 2012: Presidential Medal of Freedom
- 2013: The Nichols-Chancellor's Medal awarded by Vanderbilt University
- 2013: Honorary Doctorate of Literature awarded by Princeton University
- 2013: PEN Oakland – Josephine Miles Literary Award for *Home*
- 2013: Writer in Residence at the American Academy in Rome
- 2014: Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award given by the National Book Critics Circle
- 2016: PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction
- 2016: The Charles Eliot Norton Professorship in Poetry (The Norton Lectures), Harvard University
- 2016: The Edward MacDowell Medal, awarded by the MacDowell Colony
- 2018: The Thomas Jefferson Medal, awarded by The American Philosophical Society
- 2020: National Women's Hall of Fame inductee
- 2020: Designation of "Toni Morrison Day" in Ohio, to be celebrated annually on her birthday, February 18
- 2021: Featured on "Cleveland is the Reason" mural in downtown Cleveland (with other notable Cleveland area figures)
- 2023: Featured on a USPS Forever stamp, designed by art director Ethel Kessler with photography by Deborah Feingold

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Videos

01] A Conversation Between Toni Morrison & Frank McCourt

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMggOyA4S4k [1:53:10]

A Conversation Between Toni Morrison and Frank McCourt, moderated by Juan Williams, took place at The Connecticut Forum in Hartford, CT on May 4, 2001.

The two literary icons talked about their writing, their creative lives, and much more.

02] The Writer in America: Toni Morrison (1978)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVLEqAHeuGw [28:14]

Features Toni Morrison discussing her journey as a writer, including her experiences in a writers' group, her early life, and the challenges she faced as a single mother. She recounts how her writing became a source of relief and order during difficult times, particularly after her divorce. Morrison reflects on her novels, including "The Bluest Eye," "Sula," and "Song of Solomon," exploring themes of identity, freedom, and the complexities of relationships. She emphasizes the importance of her

characters and the influence of her upbringing on her writing, while also sharing anecdotes from her life and career as an editor and author.

03] Toni Morrison interview on her Life and Career (1990)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53F0lFMSwpc [49:50]

Toni Morrison exists in two worlds: the visible world, bustling around her, and the world of her novels, whose characters tell about an interior reality hidden from the eyes of strangers. In her work, Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison has transported millions of readers into the experience of being black in America and confronting the realities of race. In this program, Morrison discusses the characters in her work, the people in her life, the power of love, and how the invented world of fiction connects to life.

04] Toni Morrison: 3 Exclusive Interviews on Writing, Race, and Literary Legacy | Insights & Advice

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eiKYbq8ybk [2:54:13]

Explore the wisdom and creativity of Toni Morrison in this exclusive compilation of three interviews. From her groundbreaking novels to her insights on writing, storytelling, and race, Morrison shares her experiences, advice, and reflections on life as a celebrated author. Perfect for aspiring writers, literature students, and fans of contemporary American fiction, these interviews offer a rare glimpse into her creative process and the themes that define her work. Learn from one of the most influential voices in literature and discover tips, inspiration, and the legacy of Toni Morrison across decades of writing.

05] The Life of Toni Morrison

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OrdFJXP7A0 [50:46]

Listen to a captivating exploration of the life and literary legacy of Toni Morrison. Delve into the profound narrative of this Nobel Prize-winning author, as we celebrate her contributions to literature, social commentary, and the enduring power of storytelling.

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Documentary Films

Morrison was interviewed by Margaret Busby in London for a 1988 documentary film by Sindamani Bridglal, entitled *Identifiable Qualities*, shown on Channel 4.

Morrison was the subject of a film titled *Imagine – Toni Morrison Remembers*, directed by Jill Nicholls and shown on BBC One television on July 15, 2015, in which Morrison talked to Alan Yentob about her life and work.

In 2016, Oberlin College received a grant to complete a documentary film begun in 2014, *The Foreigner's Home*, about Morrison's intellectual and artistic vision, explored in the context of the 2006 exhibition she guest-curated at the Louvre. The film's executive producer was Jonathan Demme. It was directed by Oberlin College Cinema Studies faculty Geoff Pingree and Rian Brown, and incorporates footage shot by Morrison's first-born son Harold Ford Morrison, who also consulted on the film.

In 2019, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders' documentary *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.[155] Those featured in the film include Morrison, Angela Davis, Oprah Winfrey, Fran Lebowitz, Sonia Sanchez, and Walter Mosley, among others.

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The Official Website for

Toni Morrison

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE AND PULITZER PRIZE

{https://sites.prh.com/toni-morrison}

Language as Liberation

Perhaps no novelist has meant more to contemporary fiction than Toni Morrison. And in addition to being a Nobel Prize–winning novelist, Morrison spent seventeen years as the Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Humanities at Princeton University, teaching courses in African American studies, creative writing, and American literature.

Now, for the first time ever, Morrison's lectures on the American canon are compiled together, granting readers unprecedented access to Morrison's scholarship, critical eye, and relentless brilliance. Researching several of America's most famous works and authors, Morrison illuminates the relationships between race, the arts, and life beyond the page.

Morrison looks closely at Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Faulkner's South, McCullers's misfits, Stowe's sentiment, Hemingway's restraint. With an introduction from Morrison's colleague Claudia Brodsky, *Language as Liberation* is a revelatory book that once again displays Morrison's intellectual and literary greatness.

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National Endowment for the ARTS

{https://www.arts.gov/stories/magazine/2014/4/art-failure-importance-risk-and-experimentation/toni-morrison}

Toni Morrison

Write, Erase, Do It Over

Interview by Rebecca Sutton

Author Toni Morrison being awarded the 2011 National Book Festival's Creative Achievement Award. Photo by Kristina Nixon/Library of Congress.

Talking to Toni Morrison about failure is a bit like talking to Einstein about stupidity: it's incongruous, to say the least. At 83, Morrison is one of the world's best-known and most successful novelists, her awards list crammed with the heavyweights of literary prizes: among them, the 1988 Pulitzer Prize and American Book Award for Beloved*; the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 (the last U.S. author to receive it); the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012; and most recently, the Ivan Sandroff Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Book Critics Circle. As these accolades piled up, Morrison continued to work full-time as an editor or a professor of writing and literature—she wrote her first novel,* The Bluest Eye *(1970), while teaching at Howard University and raising two young sons on her own. Since then, she has written ten more novels (*God Help the Child *will be published later this year), several children's books, two plays, and a number of nonfiction works. In all her projects, her words are at once incisive as a knife and poignant as a lullaby, weaving mesmerizing narratives that probe the complexities of the African-American experience.*

The NEA has a long relationship with Morrison as well. She served on the National Council on the Arts from 1980-87 as well as on panels for our Literature Program. We were pleased to catch up with her by phone in January, as Morrison mused on the concept of creative failure.

Defining Creative Failure

As a writer, a failure is just information. It's something that I've done wrong in writing, or is inaccurate or unclear. I recognize failure—which is important; some people don't—

and fix it, because it is data, it is information, knowledge of what does not work. That's rewriting and editing.

With physical failures like liver, kidneys, heart, something else has to be done, something fixable that's not in one's own hands. But if it's in your hands, then you have to pay very close attention to it, rather than get depressed or unnerved or feel ashamed. None of that is useful. It's as though you're in a laboratory and you're working on an experiment with chemicals or with rats, and it doesn't work. It doesn't mix. You don't throw up your hands and run out of the lab. What you do is you identify the procedure and what went wrong and then correct it. If you think of [writing] simply as information, you can get closer to success.

Getting Started

Writing for me is thinking, and it's also a way to position myself in the world, particularly when I don't like what's going on. It's extremely important to me. [Confidence] came with time. I knew I always was compelled to do it, but I didn't know how essential it was to me.

I wrote the first book because I wanted to read it. I thought that kind of book, with that subject—those most vulnerable, most undescribed, not taken seriously little black girls—had never existed seriously in literature. No one had ever written about them except as props. Since I couldn't find a book that did that, I thought, "Well, I'll write it and then I'll read it." It was really the reading impulse that got me into the writing thing.

Success in the Morning

I used to get up before sunrise. I'm very, very smart in the morning, and everything is clear. By noon it's over. Then as the day wore on, I got dumber and dumber. That used to be my habit. I thought I did it because I had small children and I wanted to write before they got up. But then when they grew, I was still doing it and still preferring it. Not anymore because I'm too old. I'm 83, so some of those habits have changed.

Toni Morrison served on the NEA's National Council on the Arts from 1980-87 as well as on panels for the Literature Program. NEA File Photo

Recognizing When Something Isn't Working

[Personal] errors, I just have to let go. There are many of those. If you're a parent, God knows there's nothing you can do about it now. In writing, for me it's where the meaning lies and where it doesn't, where is it too much, or where is it not true, and then I go and rewrite it. I usually write sections by hand and then put them on the computer, print them out, and then go over them to see what's not there or what's there that is just clogging it up. You become adept at that. There are things that I've written and pieces and parts of things that I have written that I would like to do over and fix, but it's too late because they already printed it. You realize that later.

The book that I really wish I could revise is the first book I wrote, *The Bluest Eye*, because there's a character in it to whom I didn't do justice. She was just a mean girl. But why she was, or what she was thinking—her inner life—I did not explore at all. I just let her

stand as a person for the other girls to be mad at. So I always wanted to go back and rewrite that part.

Responsibility to Characters

I try really hard, even if there's a minor character, to hear their memorable lines. They really do float over your head when you're writing them, like ghosts or living people. I don't describe them very much, just broad strokes. You don't know necessarily how tall they are, because I don't want to force the reader into seeing what I see. It's like listening to the radio as a kid. I had to help, as a listener, put in all of the details. It said "blue," and I had to figure out what shade. Or if they said it was one way, I had to see it. It's a participatory thing.

[My characters] have never failed me, but on a couple of occasions I have either been deeply thrown off my game, or I took the easy way out. Some of them get greedy, and they're powerful characters. They somehow can take over the book. When I did *Song of Solomon*, there was a character in there whose name was Pilate. She was very important to the narrative, but she really threatened me in a sense. I just made her shut up, and told her this is my book, not hers. I gave her some leeway in a couple of scenes toward the end, and during the funeral of her daughter. But I do know that her presence was large, overwhelming, and the book could easily have turned into *Song of Somebody Else*. So that was one where I was actually intimidated and defensive about a character that I had invented. She was over-invented. And then there's Maureen Peal in *The Bluest Eye*.

Learning Not to Overdo It

Some writers whom I admire say everything. I have been more impressed with myself when I can say more with less instead of overdoing it, and making sure the reader knows every little detail. I'd like to rely more heavily on the reader's own emotions and intelligence. It's like writing sex scenes. What you do in such a scene is open it up so that the metaphorical language can stimulate, so that it's not clinical, it's not surgical. Then the reader can fill it out or take it in or remember it. But the rest [of getting it right] is just keep doing it. You just do it again and again.

Failures In Contemporary American Literature

I may be wrong about this, but it seems as though so much fiction, particularly that by younger people, is very much about themselves. Love and death and stuff, but my love, my death, my this, my that. Everybody else is a light character in that play.

When I taught creative writing at Princeton, [my students] had been told all of their lives to write what they knew. I always began the course by saying, "Don't pay any attention to that." First, because you don't know anything and second, because I don't want to hear about your true love and your mama and your papa and your friends. Think of somebody you don't know. What about a Mexican waitress in the Rio Grande who can barely speak English? Or what about a Grande Madame in Paris? Things way outside their camp. Imagine it, create it. Don't record and editorialize on some event that you've already lived through. I was always amazed at how effective that was. They were always out of the box when they were given license to imagine something wholly outside their existence. I thought it was a good training for them. Even if they ended up just writing an autobiography, at least they could relate to themselves as strangers.

Stumbles Along the Way

Stumbles loom rather large, the more I write. You know this is the wrong route but sometimes you choose it anyway, and then when you go over it, you just carry it out and scratch it out and do something else. But they're very important. It's like hitting the

wrong note. You have to do something else. In a musical score, if you're singing or you're playing an instrument onstage in public, and you hit a wrong note, you can't say "Oops" and leave the stage. You have to make something out of that error, do a really powerfully creative thing. You may go down a different road. If it's public, you have to have that ability, that gift to make a mistake look creative. With writing, you can always scratch out the knowledge. You write and erase and do it over.

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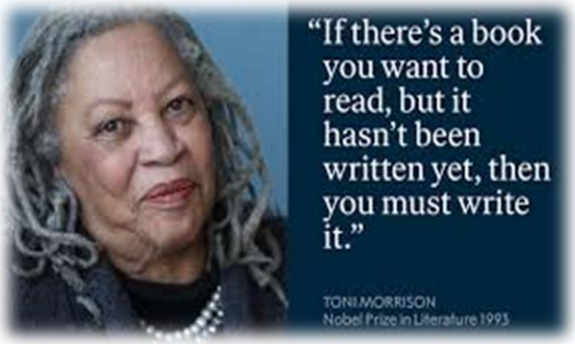
"If there's a book you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it."
TONI MORRISON
Nobel Prize in Literature 1993

Morrison, with her sons Ford (left) and Slade (right) at their upstate New York home, between 1980 and 1987.

13 Apl 1939

30 Aug 2013

Seamus Heaney

Nobel Prize in Literature 1995

Born: 13 April 1939, Casteldàwson, Northern Ireland
Died: 30 August 2013, Dublin, Ireland
Residence at the time of the award: Ireland

Prize motivation:

"for works of lyrical beauty and
ethical depth, which exalt everyday
miracles and the living past"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1995/heaney/facts/}

Links to Other Sites

[01] The Internet Poetry Archive presents several poems and sound recordings
[02] On Seamus Heaney from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[03] On Seamus Heaney from The Academy of American Poets
Obituary from BBC News
[04] On Seamus Heaney from The Poetry Foundation

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Nobel Diploma

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Photo Gallery

Kindly visit the Web Link to view 12 Photo

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1995/heaney/photo-gallery/

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Mr. Östen Sjöstrand, Member of the Swedish Academy

Translation from the Swedish text

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Irish poet Seamus Heaney was born in County Derry in Northern Ireland. The thatched farmhouse he grew up in was called Mossbawn – a name that has become mythical in Heaney's poetry. It is a place that occurs and re-occurs in concrete nearness in Heaney's poetry, from his debut in 1966 with *Death of a Naturalist* until *Seeing Things*, the most recent, published in 1991. As an example of his choice of subject matter and his style, one can choose the opening lines of "A drink of water", from *Field Work* published in 1979: "She came every morning to draw

water/Like an old bat staggering up the field:/The pump's whooping cough, the bucket's clatter/And slow diminuendo as it filled,/Announced her."
It is no pastoral idyll that Seamus Heaney conjures up, but rather the toilsome, lethargic greyness of the diurnal. Like Wordsworth, Seamus Heaney can well describe each human being as "a Child of Earth". For Seamus Heaney, poetry, like the soil, is evidently something to be ploughed and turned over.

The poet has little time for the Emerald Isle of the tourist brochures. For him Ireland is first and foremost *The Bogland*.
Heaney sees Ireland's peat bogs as a symbol of its identity, just as the potato is – with all that this recalls of the suffering during The Great Hunger in the middle of the 19th century.

The peat bogs also evoke, in their special way, the feeling of the past. One of Seamus Heaney's most expressive poems accounts for his experience of the Iron Age Tollund Man, whose body was preserved in a peat bog in Jutland. In his figure Heaney conjures forth, brutally and movingly, a culture that is both alien and familiar, a distinctive subject of ritual sacrifice, human voices silenced by the boggy landscape.

The water in the peat bogs, indeed all water, is something Seamus Heaney associates with the feminine, the Gaelic, the Catholic, the creative element in his nature. All this is deeply grounded in the poet's very being, a childhood preserved – as it were – which has not been overshadowed by his secularised British upbringing or the bitter experiences of The Troubles, the conflict in Ulster. In this context it must be said that Seamus Heaney never reduces reality to a matter of political slogans, he writes about the fates of individuals, of personal friends who have been afflicted by the heedless violence – in the background somewhere there is Dante, who could yoke the political to the transcendental.

Heaney also has links with the academic world. He has taught in Belfast and Dublin, he has been Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and since 1982 he has been teaching rhetoric and oratory at Harvard in the United States.

Seamus Heaney comes from a humble, farming community, but at the same time we meet in him a learned poet who in the very

microcosm of language cultivates and reveals the Celtic, pre-Christian and Catholic literary heritage. He does this in his poetry, and in five collections of eminently readable essays, including *The Government of the Tongue* (1968), *The Place of Writing* (1989) and *The Redress of Poetry* – the volume published this year that contains the lectures he gave at Oxford. In his essays and meditations, Heaney also specifies the poetic turning points which arose from confrontation with some remarkable poets – British, Irish, American and European – not infrequently in the spirit of his compatriot and great predecessor Patrick Kavanagh's principle: the local can articulate the universal… God is in the bits and pieces of the Everyday.

Dear Seamus Heaney,

I have just given the audience some "bits and pieces" about reality and symbol in your poems. Let me now remind you of your own Declaration of Independence - Poetry can never be reduced to a political, historical or moral issue. In the final resort poetry is its own reality. Ever since *Death of a Naturalist* I have admired the way in which you turn your back on the systematisers, to defend instead poetic creativity as a free, natural, biological process. We all admire your revealing and compelling images and rhythms, we are gladdened by your quest for sacred wells and the sudden eruption of Beauty. I am happy to convey to you, on behalf of the Swedish Academy, our warmest congratulations on the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1995 and to invite you to receive the Prize from the hands of His Majesty the King.

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Nobel Prize Lecture

Seamus Heaney delivering his Nobel Prize lecture at the Swedish Academy on 7 December 1995.

Nobel Lecture, December 7, 1995

Listen to an audio recording of Seamus Heaney's Nobel Lecture

Crediting Poetry

When I first encountered the name of the city of Stockholm, I little thought that I would ever visit it, never mind end up being welcomed to it as a guest of the Swedish Academy and the Nobel Foundation. At the time I am thinking of, such an outcome was not just beyond expectation: it was simply beyond conception. In the nineteen forties, when I was the eldest child of an ever-growing family in rural Co. Derry, we crowded together in the three rooms of a traditional thatched farmstead and lived a kind of den-life which was more or less emotionally and intellectually proofed against the outside world. It was an intimate, physical, creaturely existence in which the night sounds of the horse in the stable beyond one bedroom wall mingled with the sounds of adult conversation from the kitchen beyond the other. We took in everything that was going on, of course – rain in the trees, mice on the ceiling, a steam train rumbling along the railway line one field back from the house – but we took it in as if we were in the doze of hibernation. Ahistorical, pre-sexual, in suspension between the archaic and the modern, we were as susceptible and impressionable as the drinking water that stood in a bucket in our scullery: every time a passing train made the earth shake, the surface of that water used to ripple delicately, concentrically, and in utter silence.

But it was not only the earth that shook for us: the air around and above us was alive and signalling too. When a wind stirred in the beeches, it also stirred an aerial wire attached to the topmost branch of the chestnut tree. Down it swept, in through a hole bored in the corner of the kitchen window, right on into the innards of our wireless set where a little pandemonium of burbles and squeaks would suddenly give way to the voice of a BBC newsreader speaking out of the unexpected like a *deus ex machina.* And that voice too we could hear in our bedroom, transmitting from beyond and behind the voices of the adults in the kitchen; just as we could often hear, behind and beyond every voice, the frantic, piercing signalling of morse code.

We could pick up the names of neighbours being spoken in the local accents of our parents, and in the resonant English tones of the newsreader the names of bombers and of cities bombed, of war fronts and army divisions, the numbers of planes lost and of prisoners taken, of casualties suffered and advances made; and always, of

course, we would pick up too those other, solemn and oddly bracing words, “the enemy” and “the allies”. But even so, none of the news of these world-spasms entered me as terror. If there was something ominous in the newscaster’s tones, there was something torpid about our understanding of what was at stake; and if there was something culpable about such political ignorance in that time and place, there was something positive about the security I inhabited as a result of it.

The wartime, in other words, was pre-reflective time for me. Pre-literate too. Pre-historical in its way. Then as the years went on and my listening became more deliberate, I would climb up on an arm of our big sofa to get my ear closer to the wireless speaker. But it was still not the news that interested me; what I was after was the thrill of story, such as a detective serial about a British special agent called Dick Barton or perhaps a radio adaptation of one of Capt. W.E. Johns’s adventure tales about an RAF flying ace called Biggles. Now that the other children were older and there was so much going on in the kitchen, I had to get close to the actual radio set in order to concentrate my hearing, and in that intent proximity to the dial I grew familiar with the names of foreign stations, with Leipzig and Oslo and Stuttgart and Warsaw and, of course, with Stockholm.

I also got used to hearing short bursts of foreign languages as the dial hand swept round from BBC to Radio Eireann, from the intonations of London to those of Dublin, and even though I did not understand what was being said in those first encounters with the gutturals and sibilants of European speech, I had already begun a journey into the wideness of the world beyond. This in turn became a journey into the wideness of language, a journey where each point of arrival – whether in one’s poetry or one’s life turned out to be a stepping stone rather than a destination, and it is that journey which has brought me now to this honoured spot. And yet the platform here feels more like a space station than a stepping stone, so that is why, for once in my life, I am permitting myself the luxury of walking on air.

I credit poetry for making this space-walk possible. I credit it immediately because of a line I wrote fairly recently instructing myself (and whoever else might be listening) to “walk on air against your better judgement”. But I credit it ultimately because poetry can make an order as true to the impact of external reality and as sensitive to the inner laws of the poet’s being as the ripples that rippled in and rippled out across the water in that scullery bucket fifty years ago. An order where we can

at last grow up to that which we stored up as we grew. An order which satisfies all that is appetitive in the intelligence and prehensile in the affections. I credit poetry, in other words, both for being itself and for being a help, for making possible a fluid and restorative relationship between the mind's centre and its circumference, between the child gazing at the word "Stockholm" on the face of the radio dial and the man facing the faces that he meets in Stockholm at this most privileged moment. I credit it because credit is due to it, in our time and in all time, for its truth to life, in every sense of that phrase.

To begin with, I wanted that truth to life to possess a concrete reliability, and rejoiced most when the poem seemed most direct, an upfront representation of the world it stood in for or stood up for or stood its ground against. Even as a schoolboy, I loved John Keats's ode "To Autumn" for being an ark of the covenant between language and sensation; as an adolescent, I loved Gerard Manley Hopkins for the intensity of his exclamations which were also equations for a rapture and an ache I didn't fully know I knew until I read him; I loved Robert Frost for his farmer's accuracy and his wily down-to-earthness; and Chaucer too for much the same reasons. Later on I would find a different kind of accuracy, a moral down-to-earthness to which I responded deeply and always will, in the war poetry of Wilfred Owen, a poetry where a New Testament sensibility suffers and absorbs the shock of the new century's barbarism. Then later again, in the pure consequence of Elizabeth Bishop's style, in the sheer obduracy of Robert Lowell's and in the barefaced confrontation of Patrick Kavanagh's, I encountered further reasons for believing in poetry's ability – and responsibility – to say what happens, to "pity the planet," to be "not concerned with Poetry."

This temperamental disposition towards an art that was earnest and devoted to things as they are was corroborated by the experience of having been born and brought up in Northern Ireland and of having lived with that place even though I have lived out of it for the past quarter of a century. No place in the world prides itself more on its vigilance and realism, no place considers itself more qualified to censure any flourish of rhetoric or extravagance of aspiration. So, partly as a result of having internalized these attitudes through growing up with them, and partly as a result of growing a skin to protect myself against them, I went for years half-avoiding and half- resisting the opulence and extensiveness of poets as different as Wallace Stevens and Rainer Maria Rilke; crediting insufficiently the crystalline inwardness

of Emily Dickinson, all those forked lightnings and fissures of association; and missing the visionary strangeness of Eliot. And these more or less costive attitudes were fortified by a refusal to grant the poet any more license than any other citizen; and they were further induced by having to conduct oneself as a poet in a situation of ongoing political violence and public expectation. A public expectation, it has to be said, not of poetry as such but of political positions variously approvable by mutually disapproving groups.

In such circumstances, the mind still longs to repose in what Samuel Johnson once called with superb confidence “the stability of truth”, even as it recognizes the destabilizing nature of its own operations and enquiries. Without needing to be theoretically instructed, consciousness quickly realizes that it is the site of variously contending discourses. The child in the bedroom, listening simultaneously to the domestic idiom of his Irish home and the official idioms of the British broadcaster while picking up from behind both the signals of some other distress, that child was already being schooled for the complexities of his adult predicament, a future where he would have to adjudicate among promptings variously ethical, aesthetical, moral, political, metrical, sceptical, cultural, topical, typical, post-colonial and, taken all together, simply impossible. So it was that I found myself in the mid-nineteen seventies in another small house, this time in Co. Wicklow south of Dublin, with a young family of my own and a slightly less imposing radio set, listening to the rain in the trees and to the news of bombings closer to home-not only those by the Provisional IRA in Belfast but equally atrocious assaults in Dublin by loyalist paramilitaries from the north. Feeling puny in my predicaments as I read about the tragic logic of Osip Mandelstam’s fate in the 1930s, feeling challenged yet steadfast in my noncombatant status when I heard, for example, that one particularly sweetnatured school friend had been interned without trial because he was suspected of having been involved in a political killing. What I was longing for was not quite stability but an active escape from the quicksand of relativism, a way of crediting poetry without anxiety or apology. In a poem called “Exposure” I wrote then:

If I could come on meteorite!
Instead, I walk through damp leaves,
Husks, the spent flukes of autumn,

Imagining a hero
On some muddy compound,

His gift like a slingstone
Whirled for the desperate.

How did I end up like this?
I often think of my friends'
Beautiful prismatic counselling
And the anvil brains of some who hate me

As I sit weighing and weighing
My responsible *tristia*.
For what? For the ear? For the people?
For what is said behind-backs?
Rain comes down through the alders,
Its low conducive voices
Mutter about let-downs and erosions
And yet each drop recalls

The diamond absolutes.
I am neither internee nor informer;
An inner émigré, a grown long-haired
And thoughtful; a wood-kerne

Escaped from the massacre,
Taking protective colouring
From bole and bark, feeling
Every wind that blows;

Who, blowing up these sparks
For their meagre heat, have missed
The once in a lifetime portent,
The comet's pulsing rose.
(from North)

In one of the poems best known to students in my generation, a poem which could be said to have taken the nutrients of the symbolist movement and made them available in capsule form, the American poet Archibald MacLeish affirmed that "A poem should be equal to/not true." As a defiant statement of poetry's gift for telling truth but telling it slant, this is both cogent and corrective. Yet there are times when a deeper need enters, when we want the poem to be not only pleasurably right but compellingly wise, not only a surprising variation played upon the world, but a re-tuning of the world itself. We want the surprise to be transitive like the impatient thump which unexpectedly restores the picture to the television set, or the electric

shock which sets the fibrillating heart back to its proper rhythm. We want what the woman wanted in the prison queue in Leningrad, standing there blue with cold and whispering for fear, enduring the terror of Stalin's regime and asking the poet Anna Akhmatova if she could describe it all, if her art could be equal to it. And this is the want I too was experiencing in those far more protected circumstances in Co. Wicklow when I wrote the lines I have just quoted, a need for poetry that would merit the definition of it I gave a few moments ago, as an order "true to the impact of external reality and … sensitive to the inner laws of the poet's being."

The external reality and inner dynamic of happenings in Northern Ireland between 1968 and 1974 were symptomatic of change, violent change admittedly, but change nevertheless, and for the minority living there, change had been long overdue. It should have come early, as the result of the ferment of protest on the streets in the late sixties, but that was not to be and the eggs of danger which were always incubating got hatched out very quickly. While the Christian moralist in oneself was impelled to deplore the atrocious nature of the IRA's campaign of bombings and killings, and the "mere Irish" in oneself was appalled by the ruthlessness of the British Army on occasions like Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972, the minority citizen in oneself, the one who had grown up conscious that his group was distrusted and discriminated against in all kinds of official and unofficial ways, this citizen's perception was at one with the poetic truth of the situation in recognizing that if life in Northern Ireland were ever really to flourish, change had to take place. But that citizen's perception was also at one with the truth in recognizing that the very brutality of the means by which the IRA were pursuing change was destructive of the trust upon which new possibilities would have to be based.

Nevertheless, until the British government caved in to the strong-arm tactics of the Ulster loyalist workers after the Sunningdale Conference in 1974, a well-disposed mind could still hope to make sense of the circumstances, to balance what was promising with what was destructive and do what W.B. Yeats had tried to do half a century before, namely, "to hold in a single thought reality and justice." After 1974, however, for the twenty long years between then and the ceasefires of August 1994, such a hope proved impossible. The violence from below was then productive of nothing but a retaliatory violence from above, the dream of justice became subsumed into the callousness of reality, and people settled in to a quarter century of life-waste and spirit- waste, of hardening attitudes and narrowing possibilities that

were the natural result of political solidarity, traumatic suffering and sheer emotional self-protectiveness.

One of the most harrowing moments in the whole history of the harrowing of the heart in Northern Ireland came when a minibus full of workers being driven home one January evening in 1976 was held up by armed and masked men and the occupants of the van ordered at gunpoint to line up at the side of the road. Then one of the masked executioners said to them, “Any Catholics among you, step out here”. As it happened, this particular group, with one exception, were all Protestants, so the presumption must have been that the masked men were Protestant paramilitaries about to carry out a tit-for-tat sectarian killing of the Catholic as the odd man out, the one who would have been presumed to be in sympathy with the IRA and all its actions. It was a terrible moment for him, caught between dread and witness, but he did make a motion to step forward. Then, the story goes, in that split second of decision, and in the relative cover of the winter evening darkness, he felt the hand of the Protestant worker next to him take his hand and squeeze it in a signal that said no, don’t move, we’ll not betray you, nobody need know what faith or party you belong to. All in vain, however, for the man stepped out of the line; but instead of finding a gun at his temple, he was thrown backward and away as the gunmen opened fire on those remaining in the line, for these were not Protestant terrorists, but members, presumably, of the Provisional IRA.

It is difficult at times to repress the thought that history is about as instructive as an abattoir; that Tacitus was right and that peace is merely the desolation left behind after the decisive operations of merciless power. I remember, for example, shocking myself with a thought I had about that friend who was imprisoned in the seventies upon suspicion of having been involved with a political murder: I shocked myself by thinking that even if he were guilty, he might still perhaps be helping the future to be born, breaking the repressive forms and liberating new potential in the only way that worked, that is to say the violent way – which therefore became, by extension, the right way. It was like a moment of exposure to interstellar cold, a reminder of the scary element, both inner and outer, in which human beings must envisage and conduct their lives. But it was only a moment. The birth of the future we desire is surely in the contraction which that terrified Catholic felt on the roadside when another hand gripped his hand, not in the gunfire that followed, so absolute and so desolate, if also so much a part of the music of what happens.

As writers and readers, as sinners and citizens, our realism and our aesthetic sense make us wary of crediting the positive note. The very gunfire braces us and the atrocious confers a worth upon the effort which it calls forth to confront it. We are rightly in awe of the torsions in the poetry of Paul Celan and rightly enamoured of the suspiring voice in Samuel Beckett because these are evidence that art can rise to the occasion and somehow be the corollary of Celan's stricken destiny as Holocaust survivor and Beckett's demure heroism as a member of the French Resistance. Likewise, we are rightly suspicious of that which gives too much consolation in these circumstances; the very extremity of our late twentieth century knowledge puts much of our cultural heritage to an extreme test. Only the very stupid or the very deprived can any longer help knowing that the documents of civilization have been written in blood and tears, blood and tears no less real for being very remote. And when this intellectual predisposition co-exists with the actualities of Ulster and Israel and Bosnia and Rwanda and a host of other wounded spots on the face of the earth, the inclination is not only not to credit human nature with much constructive potential but not to credit anything too positive in the work of art.

Which is why for years I was bowed to the desk like some monk bowed over his prie-dieu, some dutiful contemplative pivoting his understanding in an attempt to bear his portion of the weight of the world, knowing himself incapable of heroic virtue or redemptive effect, but constrained by his obedience to his rule to repeat the effort and the posture. Blowing up sparks for meagre heat. Forgetting faith, straining towards good works. Attending insufficiently to the diamond absolutes, among which must be counted the sufficiency of that which is absolutely imagined. Then finally and happily, and not in obedience to the dolorous circumstances of my native place but in despite of them, I straightened up. I began a few years ago to try to make space in my reckoning and imagining for the marvellous as well as for the murderous. And once again I shall try to represent the import of that changed orientation with a story out of Ireland.

This is a story about another monk holding himself up valiantly in the posture of endurance. It is said that once upon a time St. Kevin was kneeling with his arms stretched out in the form of a cross in Glendalough, a monastic site not too far from where we lived in Co. Wicklow, a place which to this day is one of the most wooded and watery retreats in the whole of the country. Anyhow, as Kevin knelt and prayed, a blackbird mistook his outstretched hand for some kind of roost and swooped down

upon it, laid a clutch of eggs in it and proceeded to nest in it as if it were the branch of a tree. Then, overcome with pity and constrained by his faith to love the life in all creatures great and small, Kevin stayed immobile for hours and days and nights and weeks, holding out his hand until the eggs hatched and the fledglings grew wings, true to life if subversive of common sense, at the intersection of natural process and the glimpsed ideal, at one and the same time a signpost and a reminder. Manifesting that order of poetry where we can at last grow up to that which we stored up as we grew.

St. Kevin's story is, as I say, a story out of Ireland. But it strikes me that it could equally well come out of India or Africa or the Arctic or the Americas. By which I do not mean merely to consign it to a typology of folktales, or to dispute its value by questioning its culture bound status within a multi-cultural context. On the contrary, its trustworthiness and its travel-worthiness have to do with its local setting. I can, of course, imagine it being deconstructed nowadays as a paradigm of colonialism, with Kevin figuring as the benign imperialist (or the missionary in the wake of the imperialist), the one who intervenes and appropriates the indigenous life and interferes with its pristine ecology. And I have to admit that there is indeed an irony that it was such a one who recorded and preserved this instance of the true beauty of the Irish heritage: Kevin's story, after all, appears in the writings of Giraldus Cambrensis, one of the Normans who invaded Ireland in the twelfth century, one whom the Irish-language annalist Geoffrey Keating would call, five hundred years later, "the bull of the herd of those who wrote the false history of Ireland." But even so, I still cannot persuade myself that this manifestation of early Christian civilization should be construed all that simply as a way into whatever is exploitative or barbaric in our history, past and present. The whole conception strikes me rather as being another example of the kind of work I saw a few weeks ago in the small museum in Sparta, on the morning before the news of this year's Nobel Prize in literature was announced.

This was art which sprang from a cult very different from the faith espoused by St. Kevin. Yet in it there was a representation of a roosted bird and an entranced beast and a self-enrapturing man, except that this time the man was Orpheus and the rapture came from music rather than prayer. The work itself was a small carved relief and I could not help making a sketch of it; but neither could I help copying out the information typed on the card which accompanied and identified the exhibit. The

image moved me because of its antiquity and durability, but the description on the card moved me also because it gave a name and credence to that which I see myself as having been engaged upon for the past three decades: “Votive panel”, the identification card said, “possibly set up to Orpheus by local poet. Local work of the Hellenistic period.”

Once again, I hope I am not being sentimental or simply fetishizing – as we have learnt to say – the local. I wish instead to suggest that images and stories of the kind I am invoking here do function as bearers of value. The century has witnessed the defeat of Nazism by force of arms; but the erosion of the Soviet regimes was caused, among other things, by the sheer persistence, beneath the imposed ideological conformity, of cultural values and psychic resistances of a kind that these stories and images enshrine. Even if we have learned to be rightly and deeply fearful of elevating the cultural forms and conservatisms of any nation into normative and exclusivist systems, even if we have terrible proof that pride in an ethnic and religious heritage can quickly degrade into the fascistic, our vigilance on that score should not displace our love and trust in the good of the indigenous per se. On the contrary, a trust in the staying power and travel-worthiness of such good should encourage us to credit the possibility of a world where respect for the validity of every tradition will issue in the creation and maintenance of a salubrious political space. In spite of devastating and repeated acts of massacre, assassination and extirpation, the huge acts of faith which have marked the new relations between Palestinians and Israelis, Africans and Afrikaners, and the way in which walls have come down in Europe and iron curtains have opened, all this inspires a hope that new possibility can still open up in Ireland as well. The crux of that problem involves an ongoing partition of the island between British and Irish jurisdictions, and an equally persistent partition of the affections in Northern Ireland between the British and Irish heritages; but surely every dweller in the country must hope that the governments involved in its governance can devise institutions which will allow that partition to become a bit more like the net on a tennis court, a demarcation allowing for agile give-and-take, for encounter and contending, prefiguring a future where the vitality that flowed in the beginning from those bracing words “enemy” and “allies” might finally derive from a less binary and altogether less binding vocabulary.

When the poet W.B. Yeats stood on this platform more than seventy years ago, Ireland was emerging from the throes of a traumatic civil war that had followed fast

on the heels of a war of independence fought against the British. The struggle that ensued had been brief enough; it was over by May, 1923, some seven months before Yeats sailed to Stockholm, but it was bloody, savage and intimate, and for generations to come it would dictate the terms of politics within the twenty-six independent counties of Ireland, that part of the island known first of all as the Irish Free State and then subsequently as the Republic of Ireland.

Yeats barely alluded to the civil war or the war of independence in his Nobel speech. Nobody understood better than he the connection between the construction or destruction of state institutions and the founding or foundering of cultural life, but on this occasion he chose to talk instead about the Irish Dramatic Movement. His story was about the creative purpose of that movement and its historic good fortune in having not only his own genius to sponsor it, but also the genius of his friends John Millington Synge and Lady Augusta Gregory. He came to Sweden to tell the world that the local work of poets and dramatists had been as important to the transformation of his native place and times as the ambushes of guerrilla armies; and his boast in that elevated prose was essentially the same as the one he would make in verse more than a decade later in his poem "The Municipal Gallery Revisited". There Yeats presents himself amongst the portraits and heroic narrative paintings which celebrate the events and personalities of recent history and all of a sudden realizes that something truly epoch-making has occurred: " 'This is not', I say,/'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland/The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.' " And the poem concludes with two of the most quoted lines of his entire oeuvre:

> Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
> And say my glory was I had such friends.

And yet, expansive and thrilling as these lines are, they are an instance of poetry flourishing itself rather than proving itself, they are the poet's lap of honour, and in this respect if in no other they resemble what I am doing in this lecture. In fact, I should quote here on my own behalf some other words from the poem: "You that would judge me, do not judge alone/This book or that." Instead, I ask you to do what Yeats asked his audience to do and think of the achievement of Irish poets and dramatists and novelists over the past forty years, among whom I am proud to count great friends. In literary matters, Ezra Pound advised against accepting the opinion of those "who haven't themselves produced notable work," and it is advice I have

been privileged to follow, since it is the good opinion of notable workers and not just those in my own country-that has fortified my endeavour since I began to write in Belfast more than thirty years ago. The Ireland I now inhabit is one that these Irish contemporaries have helped to imagine.

Yeats, however, was by no means all flourish. To the credit of poetry in our century there must surely be entered in any reckoning his two great sequences of poems entitled “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” and “Meditations in Time of Civil War”, the latter of which contains the famous lyric about the bird’s nest at his window, where a starling or stare had built in a crevice of the old wall. The poet was living then in a Norman tower which had been very much a part of the military history of the country in earlier and equally troubled times, and as his thoughts turned upon the irony of civilizations being consolidated by violent and powerful conquerors who end up commissioning the artists and the architects, he began to associate the sight of a mother bird feeding its young with the image of the honey bee, an image deeply lodged in poetic tradition and always suggestive of the ideal of an industrious, harmonious, nurturing commonwealth:

The bees build in the crevices
Of loosening masonry, and there
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere
A man is killed, or a house burned,
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

A barricade of stone or of wood;
Some fourteen days of civil war;
Last night they trundled down the road
That dead young soldier in his blood:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart’s grown brutal from the fare;
More substance in our enmities

Than in our love; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

I have heard this poem repeated often, in whole and in part, by people in Ireland over the past twenty-five years, and no wonder, for it is as tender minded towards life itself as St. Kevin was and as tough-minded about what happens in and to life as Homer. It knows that the massacre will happen again on the roadside, that the workers in the minibus are going to be lined up and shot down just after quitting time; but it also credits as a reality the squeeze of the hand, the actuality of sympathy and protectiveness between living creatures. It satisfies the contradictory needs which consciousness experiences at times of extreme crisis, the need on the one hand for a truth telling that will be hard and retributive, and on the other hand, the need not to harden the mind to a point where it denies its own yearnings for sweetness and trust.

It is a proof that poetry can be equal to and true at the same time, an example of that completely adequate poetry which the Russian woman sought from Anna Akhmatova and which William Wordsworth produced at a corresponding moment of historical crisis and personal dismay almost exactly two hundred years ago.

When the bard Demodocus sings of the fall of Troy and of the slaughter that accompanied it, Odysseus weeps and Homer says that his tears were like the tears of a wife on a battlefield weeping for the death of a fallen husband. His epic simile continues:

At the sight of the man panting and dying there,
she slips down to enfold him, crying out;
then feels the spears, prodding her back and shoulders,
and goes bound into slavery and grief.
Piteous weeping wears away her cheeks:
but no more piteous than Odysseus' tears,
cloaked as they were, now, from the company.

Even to-day, three thousand years later, as we channel-surf over so much live coverage of contemporary savagery, highly informed but nevertheless in danger of growing immune, familiar to the point of overfamiliarity with old newsreels of the concentration camp and the gulag, Homer's image can still bring us to our senses. The callousness of those spear shafts on the woman's back and shoulders survives

time and translation. The image has that documentary adequacy which answers all that we know about the intolerable.

But there is another kind of adequacy which is specific to lyric poetry. This has to do with the “temple inside our hearing” which the passage of the poem calls into being. It is an adequacy deriving from what Mandelstam called “the steadfastness of speech articulation,” from the resolution and independence which the entirely realized poem sponsors. It has as much to do with the energy released by linguistic fission and fusion, with the buoyancy generated by cadence and tone and rhyme and stanza, as it has to do with the poem’s concerns or the poet’s truthfulness. In fact, in lyric poetry, truthfulness becomes recognizable as a ring of truth within the medium itself. And it is the unappeasable pursuit of this note, a note tuned to its most extreme in Emily Dickinson and Paul Celan and orchestrated to its most opulent in John Keats, it is this which keeps the poet’s ear straining to hear the totally persuasive voice behind all the other informing voices.

Which is a way of saying that I have never quite climbed down from the arm of that sofa. I may have grown more attentive to the news and more alive to the world history and world-sorrow behind it. But the thing uttered by the speaker I strain towards is still not quite the story of what is going on; it is more reflexive than that, because as a poet I am in fact straining towards a strain, seeking repose in the stability conferred by a musically satisfying order of sounds. As if the ripple at its widest desired to be verified by a reformation of itself, to be drawn in and drawn out through its point of origin.

I also strain towards this in the poetry I read. And I find it, for example, in the repetition of that refrain of Yeats’s, “Come build in the empty house of the stare,” with its tone of supplication, its pivots of strength in the words “build” and “house” and its acknowledgement of dissolution in the word “empty”. I find it also in the triangle of forces held in equilibrium by the triple rhyme of “fantasies” and “enmities” and “honey-bees”, and in the sheer in-placeness of the whole poem as a given form within the language. Poetic form is both the ship and the anchor. It is at once a buoyancy and a steadying, allowing for the simultaneous gratification of whatever is centrifugal and whatever is centripetal in mind and body. And it is by such means that Yeats’s work does what the necessary poetry always does, which is to touch the base of our sympathetic nature while taking in at the same time the

unsympathetic nature of the world to which that nature is constantly exposed. The form of the poem, in other words, is crucial to poetry's power to do the thing which always is and always will be to poetry's credit: the power to persuade that vulnerable part of our consciousness of its rightness in spite of the evidence of wrongness all around it, the power to remind us that we are hunters and gatherers of values, that our very solitudes and distresses are creditable, in so far as they, too, are an earnest of our veritable human being.

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Banquet Speech

Seamus Heaney's speech at the Nobel Banquet, December 10, 1995

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's ceremonies and tonight's banquet have been mighty and memorable events. Nobody who has shared in them will ever forget them, but for the laureates these celebrations have had a unique importance. Each of us has participated in a ritual, a rite of passage, a public drama which has been commensurate with the inner experience of winning a Nobel Prize. The slightly incredible condition we have lived in since the news of the prizes was announced a couple of weeks ago has now been rendered credible. The mysterious powers represented by the words Nobel Foundation and Swedish Academy have manifested themselves in friendly human form. For me, it has been a great joy and a great reassurance to come to Stockholm and to meet at every turn people of such grace, such intelligence and such good will. Which is another way of saying that the whole week has not only been ceremonially impressive: it has also felt emotionally true, and it is that sense of something personally trustworthy at the centre of the great event that I finally value most, and cherish and give you thanks for. It has helped more than anything else to bring home to me the reality of the great honour I have received. Oscar Wilde once said that the only way to survive temptation was to yield to it. So here and now, I happily and gratefully yield to the temptation to believe that I am indeed the winner of a Nobel Prize. Thank you very much.

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Poetry

Mossbawn

For Mary Heaney

I. Sunlight

There was a sunlit absence.
The helmeted pump in the yard

heated its iron,
water honeyed

in the slung bucket
and the sun stood
like a griddle cooling
against the wall

of each long afternoon.
So, her hands scuffled
over the bakeboard,
the reddening stove

sent its plaque of heat
against her where she stood
in a floury apron
by the window.

Now she dusts the board
with a goose's wing,
now sits, broad-lapped,
with whitened nails

and measling shins:
here is a space
again, the scone rising
to the tick of two clocks.

And here is love
like a tinsmith's scoop
sunk past its gleam
in the meal-bin.

The Haw Lantern

The wintry haw is burning out of season,
crab of the thorn, a small light for small people,
wanting no more from them but that they keep

the wick of self-respect from dying out,
not having to blind them with illumination.

But sometimes when your breath plumes in the frost
it takes the roaming shape of Diogenes
with his lantern, seeking one just man;
so you end up scrutinized from behind the haw
he holds up at eye-level on its twig,
and you flinch before its bonded pith and stone,
its blood-prick that you wish would test and clear you,
By its pecked-at ripeness that scans you, then moves on.

Lightenings viii

The annals say: when the monks of Clonmacnoise
Were all at prayers inside the oratory
A ship appeared above them in the air.

The anchor dragged along behind so deep
It hooked itself into the altar rails
And then, as the big hull rocked to a standstill,

A crewman shinned and grappled down the rope
And struggled to release it. But in vain.
'This man can't bear our life here and will drown,'

The abbot said, 'unless we help him.' So
They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed back
Out of the marvellous as he had known it.

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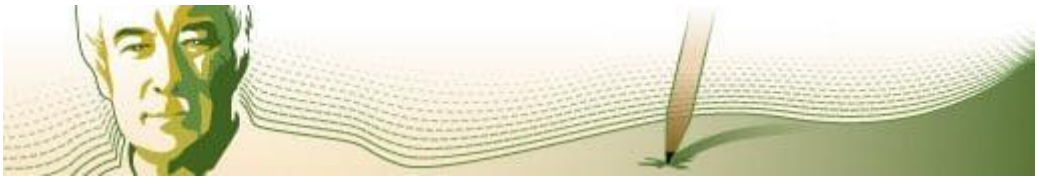
Article



This is not a spade:
The poetry of Seamus Heaney

by Ola Larsmo*
This article was published on 20 February 2007.

At the core of Seamus Heaney's poetry a profound experience is revealed – that a gap exists between the totality of what can be said and the totality of all that can be witnessed, between the limits of languages and the margins of the actual world in which we live. For Heaney 'poetry' is a means of measuring this gap – if not bridging it.

In Heaney's early poems this gap is connected to a sense of deep loss and even of moral guilt. The young poet keeps encountering a growing distance between the world of language and the physical world he sees around him. In a biographical sense, this may be linked to the fact of being born within an agrarian society where the poet has his roots, but from which the gifts of language and education has excluded him, so that he does not fully belong there any more. This distance is superbly captured in his poem 'Digging', from the debut collection *Death of a Naturalist* (1966).
The young Heaney sits by his desk, pen in hand, and watches his father digging in the garden. As both come from a long line of Ulster farmers, the father is doing what the Heaneys have been doing for generations: tending the land.

> by God, the old man could handle a spade.
> Just like his old man.

The son does something different:

> But I've no spade to follow men like them.
> Between my finger and my thumb
> The squat pen rests.
> I'll dig with it.

The son has moved into a different world, yet, through his words, both tasks become related. Both dig beneath the surface of things, cultivating the possibilities of what may grow. In this early poem – the first one in his *Selected Poems* – Heaney uses a rhetoric figure that for a considerable period would be his trademark: the 'chiasma', or crossing of themes. The poem starts out with the image of the pen, and goes on to relate what could be termed as the young intellectual's respect and awe for the seemingly commonplace skills of the working man, represented by his father's 'spademanship' – before the focus returns to the pen, which has now been transformed to a tool for hard work – which Heaney enlists in the genealogical, or historical, line of working men. The pen and the spade trade places and within the course of the poem, quite literally, became metaphors for each other. Spade-as-pen; pen-as-spade.

This 'crossing of themes' is a method that Heaney uses repeatedly. In one of the more quoted of his 'Glanmore Sonnets' from the collection *Field Work* (1979) you can see the more mature poet playing with the same method of building a poem, only now in a more intricate fashion:

> Outside the kitchen window a black rat
> Sways on the briar like infected fruit:
> 'It looked me through, it stared me out, I'm not
> Imagining things. Go you out to it.'
> Did we come to the wilderness for this?
>
> We have our burnished bay tree at the gate,
> Classical, hung with the reek of silage
> From the next farm, tart-leafed as inwit.
> Blood on a pitchfork, blood on chaff and hay,
> Rats speared in the sweat and dust of threshing –
> What is my apology for poetry?
>
> The empty briar is swishing
> When I come down, and beyond, inside, your face
> Haunts like a new moon glimpsed through tangled glass.

A poem such as this becomes almost mathematical in its precision. On the way downstairs the writing "I" of the poem has identified himself with the small, exposed and wordless living thing, the rat: at the end of the poem the "I" looks up at the window, himself in the position of the rat. In the last stanza the poet has traded places with the rat itself, the intruder, that threatening piece of nature.

Halfway there you find the real hinge of the poem, the place where things trade places: the "bay tree", symbol of poetry and a classic heritage, "reek with silage". A familiar, rural smell, in itself a modern phenomenon of the countryside, is projected onto the symbol of antiquity. And the moral problem from the poem 'Digging' presents itself again.

Blood on a pitchfork, blood on chaff and hay,
Rats speared in the sweat and dust of threshing –
What is my apology for poetry?

Does poetry need an excuse? Or a defence: the word "apology" is, of course, ambiguous. In the sheer face of bloody violence, the everyday slaughter in the farmyard or the political violence of Irish history, past and present – what place is there for poetry at all, what role can this heightened form of language play in the face of crisis, death, distress?

This is the question addressed in one of Heaneys' best essays on literature and the 'meaning' of poetry, 'Feeling into Words' (in *Preoccupations*, 1980). He takes his starting point in a quote from one of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, number 65: "How, with this rage, shall beauty hold a plea?"
This question is central to Heaney's own poetry and to his prose writings about his own poetry and that by others: among his close, literary 'relatives' you find a number of other Nobel Laureates, such as Joseph Brodsky, Derek Walcott and Czesław Miłosz. How then should beauty, or poetry, hold a plea?
The answer, that slowly works its way to the surface in all of Heaney's writings, is quite straightforward. By showing us things as they are.

As he writes in another of the 'Glanmore Sonnets', which takes its poetic impulse from the BBC weather report:

Dogger. Rockall. Malin. Irish Sea:
Green, swift upsurges, North Atlantic flux
Conjured by that strong gale-warning voice,
Collapse into a sibilant penumbra.
(…)

L'Etoile, Le Guillemot, La Belle Helene
Nursed their bright names this morning in the bay
That toiled like mortar. It was marvellous
And actual. I said out loud, 'A haven,'
The word deepening, clearing, like the sky
Elsewhere on Minches, Cromarty, The Faroes.

The "actual" is "A haven". Heaney creates a way in which you learn to see the actual world around you, in a new light. But "seeing" in the Heaney sense can mean two things, two concepts which we find in the centre of modernist poetry; 'epiphany' and 'correspondence'.

It is quite simple: 'epiphany' is here, as in the works of James Joyce and Tomas Tranströmer, the moment where you experience a sudden insight into the meaning of things seemingly trivial, for example the BBC weather forecast –how it in itself can contain a world of life, of thousands of living people along a coastline, exposed to the same weather, something very

real as the rain and the wind – as opposed to strange political ideas of 'purity', 'nation' or 'race'. A haven.

'Correspondence', on the other hand, is when you realise previously invisible connections between things, connections perhaps only made possible through the special kind of language we call poetry. The most obvious case of correspondences in Heaneys' work you find in the suite of poems he wrote in the early seventies, where he – again like Tranströmer – shows his fascination with the 'bog bodies', the startlingly well-preserved remains of prisoners executed and buried in peat bogs in Denmark in prehistoric times. The most well known example is 'the Tollund man', who was strangled somewhere around the year 350 B.C., and was sunk into a peat bog outside of Silkeborg in Denmark.

The custom of human sacrifice combined with the burial of the victims in bogs is connected to the Celtic culture of the time, a point driven home by Heaney in his poems about the 'bog bodies' in *Wintering Out* (1972) where he openly compares the – in our eyes – senseless murder of human beings, for the sake of an abstract god or goddess, to the slaughter of men and women, for the abstract ideas of nationalism and loyalism, in his own contemporary Ulster.

The here and now is a sanctuary, we live in a real world, it has to be seen, you have to experience its stark reality if you are not to succumb to seductive ideologies. But, on the other hand: everything you see is in itself connected to a vibrating sense of history, everything has meanings beyond itself, and beyond your own life. That is the paradox, if you will, that you find in Heaney's earlier poetry.

But a paradox can, strangely enough, be something very stable. You have 'this' on the one hand, and 'that' on the other. The first phase of Heaney's poetry can rest almost comfortably in that kind of balance. A metaphor is introduced in the first stanza and recurs, with its meaning turned inside out, in the last. This kind of irony has its place. But Heaney's poetry has continued to grow and change. It has become more restless.

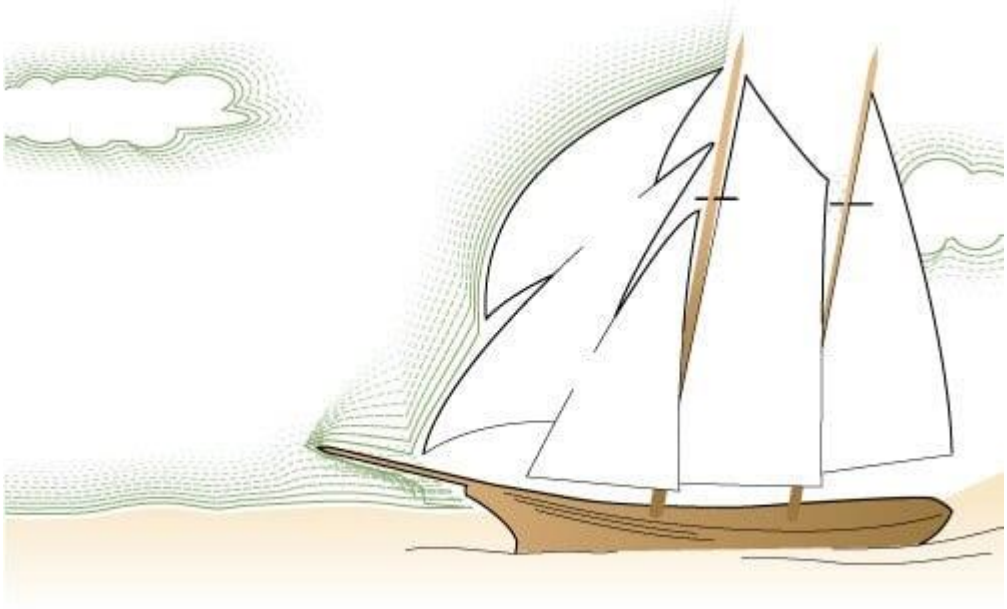
This change is visible in a collection like *Electric Light* from 2001. Nothing has been lost, but new elements have been added. In the poem that gives the book its title, you recognize the 'old' Heaney:

> In the first house where I saw electric light,
> She sat with her fur-lined felt slippers unzipped
> Year in, year out, in the same chair, and whispered
> In a voice that at its loudest did nothing else
> But whisper.

In this poem you see the weaving together of the old, rural community – here represented by the poets' grandparents, the oral storytelling, the old farmhouse with the stable on the other side of the bedroom wall. And the

electric light, the "wireless" set with its green eye and voices from afar. Vintage Heaney.

But in the same volume you also find a poem like 'The Loose Box' – a strange, winding tale that starts out in an ordinary, abandoned stable, somewhere in the northern Irish countryside – and then moves on to the birth of Jesus on a bed of straw, in another stable – and then covers the fall of Troy (with the use of a wooden horse, filled with straw), to the death of Irish revolutionary Michael Collins in the civil war – and his own background in the countryside, in the stable, on the straw. You could boil it all down to one sentence: "all flesh is straw" – but it is not a stable poem in the way that Heaney's poems used to be stable. Something happens here, in a pun or word-play with the word "stable" – and all of history comes undone, spilling into the poets' own biography, spilling straw. It is a magnificent poem. It is like seeing a sail flapping in the wind, not because the ship has lost its momentum but because it is ready to change its course.



This tendency to outgrow the balances and ironies of the earlier phases is very visible in Seamus Heaney's latest collection to date, *District and Circle* (2006). The district and circle in the title shows itself to be the subway system, subterranean connections deep underground. All the elements from his earlier works are very present, like in the opening poem about the old "turnip-snedder", an ancient piece of farming machinery that sits abandoned in a barn somewhere – but still loaded with meaning and threat, as being watched by a child that now has grown up to become a poet: "*this is the way that God sees life.*" A churning mechanism, impersonal, forceful, ready to crush turnips and boys' fingers alike.
District and Circle is also a book that digs deeper and deeper into memory: it recalls boyhood encounters, the American presence in Northern Ireland during World War II, even the 'Tollund man' himself makes a guest appearance. But the very method of this 'new' poetry is not to balance things evenly on a scale, but to make them merge, go up into each other.

This is very visible in the subway poem. Heaney has written about the "underground" before, in the opening poem of *Station Island* (1984) where the poet, hurrying through the London subway, finds himself transformed into Orpheus, dreading the moment when he has to look back over his shoulder.
That was a poem about death, about loss. The same is true about *District and Circle*: the "underground" is here the realm of the dead, too, something that becomes apparent in the opening lines:

Tunes from a tin-whistle underground
Curled up a corridor I was walking down

Where the eerie music at the same time is that of a street musician and at the same time the alluring music of the "people underground", the Tuatha de Danaan of Irish folk lore. The poem goes on in the same vein, with the vendor in the ticket booth being Charon, which is obvious without the poet mentioning it. Stepping onto the subway carriage becomes the passing on, with all the other passengers, to another destination:

My back to the unclosed door, the platform empty;
And wished it could have lasted

… and the poet sees his father's face in his own reflection in the window, it all leading up to the final stanza:

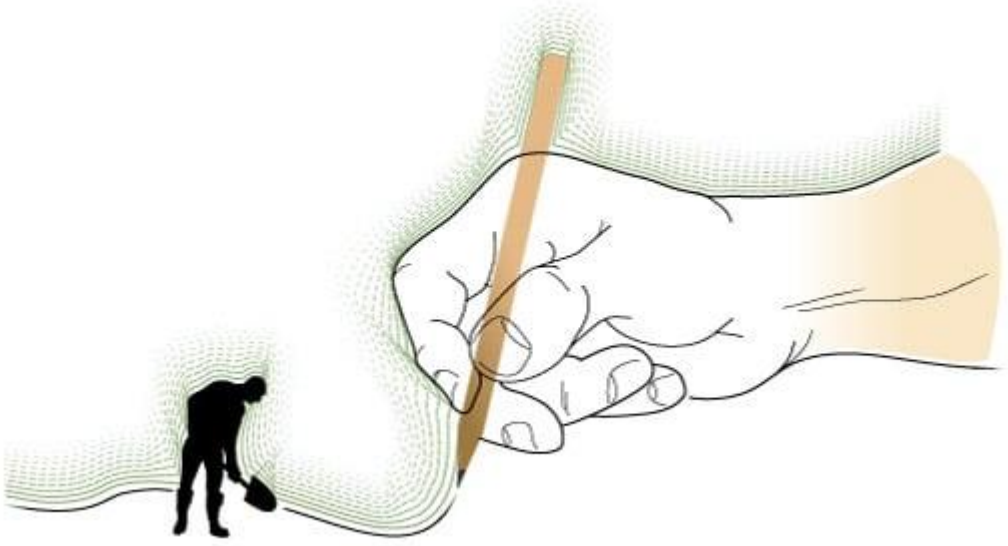
And so by night and day to be transported
Through galleried earth with them, the only relict
Of all that I belonged to, hurtled forward,
Reflecting in a window mirror-backed
By blasted weeping rock-walls
Flicker-lit.

The distance between language and world is gone. The subway train is a subway train, no more, no less; at the same time the voyage is a ritual passing from life to death, a fact that is stated nowhere in the poem, but nonetheless becomes obvious to the reader. The train is no 'metaphor' for death, it is death.

This transformation is present in all the best poems in the volume. 'Poet to blacksmith' claims to be a translation of a letter from the Irish-speaking, 18th century poet Rua Ó Súilleabháin to his blacksmith, asking for a new kind of spade, perfect, shining, with "no trace of hammer to the blade".

And best thing of all, the ring of it, sweet as a bell

The reader has no problem here recognizing the spade from 'Digging'. It is no longer a question of pen and spade trying to coexist, or doing 'the same thing'. They now *are* the very same thing. The gap has, in one way at least, finally been bridged. By poetry itself.



As in 'A Shiver'. On the surface, a poem about knowing your tools, about craftsmanship or silent knowledge: deeper down, about a labour that has been there all the time, throughout forty years of writing:

> The way you had to stand to swing the sledge,
> Your two knees locked, your lower back shock-fast
> As shields in a *testudo*, spine and waist
> A pivot for the tight-braces, tilting rib-cage;
> The way its iron head planted the sledge
> Unyieldingly as a club-footed last;
> The way you had to heft and then half-rest
> Its gathered force like a long-nursed rage
> About to be let fly: do you good
> To have known it in your bones, directable,
> Withholdable at will,
> A first blow that could make air of a wall,
> A last one so unanswerably landed
> The staked earth quailed and shivered in the handle?

Poetry *is* that shiver in the handle.

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* **Ola Larsmo** (b. 1957), writer and literary critic. Between 1984–1990 Larsmo was editor of *BLM* ('Bonniers Literary Magazine'). Today he writes literary criticism in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. Ola Larsmo has published some fifteen books, alone and in collaboration with others, mainly novels, but also essays on contemporary Irish and Swedish literature and on the subject of the Internet and democracy. His latest novel is *En glänta i skogen* ('A Glen in the Forest', 2004). In the fall of 2007 it will be followed by *Djävulssonaten* ('The Devil's Sonata').

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PRESS RELEASE

Swedish Academy
The Permanent Secretary

Press release
October 5, 1995

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1995
Seamus Heaney

"for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past"

Seamus Heaney was born on a farm some distance west of Belfast in Northern Ireland 56 years ago. After studies and marriage he moved to the Irish Republic and has been living in Dublin since 1976. He has held a post as visiting professor in rhetoric at Harvard since 1982, and from 1989 to 1994 he was Professor of Poetry at Oxford. Heaney is a poet, essayist and translator.

One point of departure for Heaney is what he calls, in one of the poems in his collection "North" (1975), northern reticence. He sympathises with this stance but is of course at the same time aware of the risks it involves for a writer. In an interview, he acknowledges that he feels a form of guilt when he writes. He assumes that generations of rural ancestors – who while not illiterate were not literary either – are asserting themselves within him. He speaks with warmth of the rich experience his parents have communicated, but can also express some impatience with their reticence. It is against this background that one can read the poem "Alphabets" (in "The Haw Lantern",

1987) with the lines "The poet's dream stole over him like sunlight / And passed into the tenebrous thickets".

As an Irish Catholic he has concerned himself with analysis of the violence in Northern Ireland – with the express reservation that he wants to avoid the conventional terms. In his opinion, the fact that there has been unwillingness on both sides to speak out – even about manifest injustices – has been of great importance in the explosive development. But he also opposes the defeatism of the Catholics, as in the poem "From the canton of expectation" (in "The Haw Lantern") which begins: "We lived deep in a land of optative moods, / under high, banked clouds of resignation."

In collections of essays such as "The Government of the Tongue" (1988) and "The Place of Writing" (1989) Heaney discusses the role of poetry and the poet, a theme he often returns to. Experiences from the lives of Osip Mandelstam and other 20th century writers lead him to the conclusion that the task of the poet is to ensure the survival of beauty, especially in times when tyrannical regimes threaten to destroy it.

In 1990 Heaney published "The Cure at Troy", a translation of Sophocles' "Philoctetes", from the point of view of composition the most modern of the classical dramas. The play was staged by the Field Day Theatre in the same year and received a positive reception although no direct link was made to his poetry. It can, however, be seen as one element of Heaney's continual endeavour to find poetic expression for complex ethical issues. The translation points forward to his next collection of poems.

"Seeing Things" (1991) includes the very interesting section "Squarings". Here the poems consist of twelve lines, their fixed, restrained form matching only superficially the content of the poems with their breadth of variation. A poem like "Lightenings viii", on the miracle at Clonmacnoise, is a crystallisation of much of Heaney's imaginative world: history and sensuality, myths and the day-to-day – all articulated in Heaney's rich language.

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Prizes and Honours

- 1966: Eric Gregory Award
- 1967: Cholmondeley Award
- 1968: Somerset Maugham Award
- 1968: Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize
- 1975: E. M. Forster Award
- 1975: Duff Cooper Prize for *North*
- 1995: Nobel Prize in Literature

- 1996: Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres
- 1997: Elected Saoi of Aosdána
- 1998: St. Louis Literary Award from the Saint Louis University Library Associates
- 2000: Elected to the American Philosophical Society
- 2000: Fiddler's Green Festival Creative Arts Award
- 2001: Golden Wreath of Poetry, given by Struga Poetry Evenings for life achievement in the field of poetry
- 2004: Kenyon Review Award for Literary Achievement
- 2005: Irish PEN Award
- 2006: T. S. Eliot Prize for *District and Circle*
- 2007: Poetry Now Award for *District and Circle*
- 2009: David Cohen Prize
- 2011: Poetry Now Award for *Human Chain*
- 2011: Bob Hughes Lifetime Achievement Award
- 2012: Griffin Poetry Prize, Lifetime Recognition Award

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Videos

01] Nobel Lecture by Seamus Heaney

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7KzfqtL5qY [51:20]

02] Seamus Heaney Reads from His Work

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tj8dATdoES0 [52:27]

03] Seamus Heaney on poetry - The New Yorker Festival

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HWurkQ1ao4 [51:50]

04] An Afternoon with Seamus Heaney

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpdzarVGOfs [1:02:29]

Recorded in 1988, this interview with Seamus Heaney touches on his childhood in rural Ireland near Slieve Gallion, the politics of Northern Ireland, his poetic craft and the natural world's influence on his work. Heaney sits onstage with Georgetown University's George O'Brien in front of an audience of students at Howard Community College in Maryland. With his arm slung over the back of the chair, Heaney talks, reads, recites, and laughs. His work is grounded in rural Ireland's physical world, he says: "So the places and the people that are there, there are also places and presences that allowed that richness, that generated that thing

in the language itself, to begin with. There was a kind of hedonistic, self-indulgent quality to writing about all that too." He reads "Alphabets" and "From the Republic of Conscience", "A Peacock's Feather", and sonnets from "Clearances". He also recites "Digging". This video broadcast with permission from the Heaney family estate and Faber & Faber Ltd. For more information about HoCoPoLitSo, to obtain a full transcript, or to support live or taped literary programming, visit www.hocopolitso.org

05] Seamus Heaney

(a) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOTrSdlsPVk [43:16]

(b) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwLrHOZDOM8 [1:27:48]

06] Seamus Heaney interview on his Life and Career + Poetry Reading

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e87nqv9PiLA [50:15]

Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney has been judged by Robert Lowell to be the most important Irish poet since Yeats. Melvyn Bragg joins Heaney to look back over Heaney's career at the time his best-selling collection Seeing Things—a return to the rural childhood territory of his very first book—was published, offering a rare opportunity to hear the poet read and discuss his work. Through poems including "Death of a Naturalist," "The Toome Road," "Wheels Within Wheels," "The Strand at Lough Beg" and "Seeing Things," he describes his efforts to balance losses with life's marvels, the lyrical with the elegiac, and social responsibility with creative freedom in a society divided by religion and politics.

07] Seamus Heaney: A Poetry Reading to Honor His Life and Work

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3CFDs51weE [59:26]

08] A Special Evening with Seamus Heaney and Peter Fallon

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dom-3DJzVs0 [1:12:44]

Irish Studies presents a special Evening with Peter Fallon and Seamus Heaney celebrating 10 years of the Charles A. Heimbold Jr. chair of Irish Studies.

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Use in the school syllabus

Heaney's work is used extensively in the school syllabus internationally, including the anthologies *The Rattle Bag* (1982) and *The School Bag* (1997) (both edited with Ted Hughes). Originally entitled *The Faber Book of Verse for Younger People* on the Faber contract, Hughes and Heaney decided the main purpose of *The Rattle Bag* was to offer enjoyment to the reader: "Arbitrary riches." Heaney commented "the book in our heads was something closer to *The Fancy Free Poetry Supplement*". It included work that they would have liked to encounter sooner in

their own lives, as well as nonsense rhymes, ballad-type poems, riddles, folk songs and rhythmical jingles. Much familiar canonical work was not included, since they took it for granted that their audience would know the standard fare. Fifteen years later, *The School Bag* aimed at something different. The foreword stated that they wanted "less of a carnival, more like a checklist." It included poems in English, Irish, Welsh, Scots and Scots Gaelic, together with work reflecting the African-American experience.

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An Interview with Seamus Heaney

BY ELEANOR WACHTEL

{https://brickmag.com/an-interview-with-seamus-heaney/}

Seamus Heaney was born into a Catholic nationalist family in the mainly Protestant unionist Northern Ireland. When he was eleven, he won a scholarship to a boarding school, St. Columb's College in Derry. He went on to university teachers' college in Belfast, publishing his first book of poetry when he was twenty-seven. Forty-four years later, he is the author of a dozen poetry collections, numerous translations, plays, prose, and countless chapbooks and limited editions. His following is so large that crowds lining up to hear him are dubbed "Heaneyboppers."

Heaney's poems engage with the immediacy of the natural world, its physicality. He celebrates the domestic sphere but always with an awareness of the world beyond. Some lines in a poem called "Terminus" capture that sense, describing how when he digs, he finds both an acorn and a rusted bolt. If he looks up, he sees a factory chimney and a mountain. "Is it any wonder when I thought / I would have second thoughts?" he writes, and, later in that poem: "Two buckets were easier carried than one. / I grew up in between." That "in between" isn't just a political line but reflects his posture in relation to the world.

Heaney has divided his time between County Wicklow and Dublin since 1972. For twenty years, he taught one semester a year at Harvard, and between 1989 and 1994 he held the position of Professor of Poetry at Oxford. In 1995, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. His new collection, Human Chain*, will be coming out this fall.*

Wachtel: You were born at Mossbawn Farm in County Derry, Northern Ireland, and you say these details are retold so often in introductions and bios that you can scarcely believe them yourself anymore, but all the same, what are your earliest memories of Mossbawn Farm?

Heaney: Well, my earliest memory is of my foot touching the ground of Mossbawn, the County Derry earth, or rather a floor laid above the earth. I was in a cot made by the local carpenter, and the bottom of the cot consisted of slats of timber, little smooth boards laid on kind of ledges. They weren't nailed down; obviously you wanted to be able to lift them because the children would be peeing on them or doing worse. I remember lifting one or two of those boards and stepping off the bottom of the cot down onto the smooth, cool cement floor of the house. And I can still feel my little foot inside my old foot here. So that's my very first memory, undoubtedly. The house was a typical thatched, whitewashed, long, low country farmhouse of that era, part of the vernacular architecture of rural Ireland. It faced out to the local county road, and behind it, one field away, was the railway called the London, Midland, and Scottish Railway, which stopped operating sometime in the late 1950s, early 1960s. But through the 1940s, the trains were running, and the big powerful noise would come over the field of a steam engine shunting up to the station at Castledawson. I mean, I could talk about this till the cows came home.

Wachtel: [*laughs*]

Heaney: There were cows at home in the byre across the yard. There was a horse in the stable. The stable was under the roof with the dwelling house, and one of the big comforting sounds quite often was the horse going *nhrrrrr*in the stable at the other end of the house. We didn't have a fire on the hearth, but we did have water from the pump, and there were wells around the place. What with thatch and well water and horse-drawn vehicles and horse ploughs and so on, when I look back on it, there's a strong sense that it belonged in another age, really.

Heaney: We lived a kind of Arcadian life in Mossbawn. If you'd been living in Warsaw or London, or Birmingham, or even Belfast where they were bombed during the war, you'd have a very different sense of what the world was, and maybe your make-believe would have been more defensive. But I often quote William Wordsworth thinking of his childhood before he went to boarding school: "Fair seed-time had my soul," he says, "and I grew up / Fostered alike by beauty and by fear." And actually any fear I had was on the whole elemental fear. Wordsworth was afraid in the mountains, I was scared by frogs and rats . . . and frogs spawning, which went into my first poem, "Death of a Naturalist." That kind of thing was all over the place. The usual rural childhood anxieties. But generally it was a very secure time up till the age of twelve, when I went to boarding school.

Wachtel: What frightened you about frogs spawning?

Heaney: Well, I went down into this area where there was a flax-dam, and they were there as physical creatures with their necks pulsing, as I say in the poem. They were

croaking, and it was a very kind of sinister croak, a kind of chorus of croaking, and it just was scaresome to me. I dramatized it a little in the poem. I said I ran away, but I certainly turned. I was afraid of them. I don't quite know what age I was. Maybe five, six, seven, I don't know, but the sense of the gross, physical frogginess of them all and the sound they made. And the stink of the flax-dam at the same time, that was another factor in the repellent aspect of it.

Wachtel: The land around you comes up frequently in your poetry and your prose. How important is that physical environment when you look back on your childhood?

Heaney: For me it was all-important. When I think back, it's sensation, really, rather than intellection that returns to me. A feel for places. I mean, the body stores so much. I can remember holding the handles of a horse plough, for example, with my father's hands over my hands to help me guide it. When the ploughshare would hit a small stone in the furrow, that travelled back up the handles through the grip into your own hand like a little bleep. I still remember that, but I think that's not uncommon, is it? What is stored bodily is very important for memory, and I think that other bodily sensations later on can bring it all back.

Wachtel: I remember that image of the horse plough in your poem "Follower." It's not just the land but the tools for engaging with it that are so vivid—from your earliest poems, such as "Digging," right up to recent ones.

Heaney: Yes, that's true. My head is furnished with medieval tools like sledgehammers and iron spikes to drive into walls and horse collars and so on. There's something in me that responds very physically and emotionally to them. It's as if one has a better grip on things when I get my hand or my tongue around those particular objects.

In my last book I did a poem about a sledgehammer hitting a post, but I think it wasn't just a physical sensation I was trying to get at. It was about the full exercise of merciless, violent power. It was a poem written after Iraq. There were no Iraq references in it, but it is about the sense of transgression you have when you utterly, mercilessly use a sledgehammer, even when hitting a dead post. There's a kind of unrestrained fury, an unforgiving brutality to it that I wanted to get. So I think that you can transmit sensation but hopefully suggest and effect a consequence as well.

Wachtel: Your father was a cattle dealer. Can you tell me a bit about him?

Heaney: His work—his calling, really—involved him going out on the road to fairs, buying cattle there, and then bringing them back home and supplying other farmers. Or he would get orders from local farmers and would go to the fairs to buy the beasts at a certain rate and bring them back and sell them at some profit or other. So he was a kind of middleman between small farmers and other cattle dealers.

We're talking about a culture now that has gone completely. I mean, there are no fair days in the way there used to be when local people drove the cattle into the main street of the local village, and there was a big assembly on the first Monday of every month or the second Tuesday of every month or whatever. Now, and in the later days of my father's life, all that negotiation is done in auction rings and it's much more corporate. What he did was find individual beasts and make individual deals at the fair and then on the farm. He was a very good judge of cattle and was much sought by people who wanted decent stock, and I suppose he was trusted also.

Wachtel: You've described him as a solid, quiet country man with country confidence. So he didn't say that much?

Heaney: No, he didn't speak that much, no. I've often said my father regarded speech as a kind of affectation. He suspected the statement of too many good intentions and good sentiments. He assumed that intuitive transmission was the real thing. If it was overstated, he tended to shy away from it.

Wachtel: By overstated you mean stated.

Heaney: Yes, indeed. Statement was overstatement to some extent, that's right.

Wachtel: When your father died in 1986, you said the roof came off the world. Can you tell me what in particular that meant for you?

Heaney: I was forty-seven, I think. My mother died in 1984, and my father died a couple of years later. And I think maybe that's just a common experience; that you are next in line, there's nothing over your head in terms of age, in terms of a parent. It coincided in my own life with a wonderful bout of writing a couple of years later—1988, 1989—a sequence of poems eventually called *Squarings*. They were terrifically free, and they began with an image of an unroofed wall-stead of an old ruined house and an image of the soul as a beggar standing in the doorway. I suppose that particular image began to take hold of me—the idea of an unroofed space and the creature, soul-body, down here with nothing between it and the infinite. And all the early formation, all the early religious imagery that I got for life and death, for the meaning of your life on earth and then your afterlife, all that somehow was stirred again. For anybody in my generation, certainly in the Irish Catholic generation, the soul was like a little white handkerchief, unstained, and you would stain it with sin and so on. But more important was the sense that the whole universe was governed by the deity, that there was divine attention being paid not just to the universe but to you yourself. You're like a little drop of water in this great ocean, you're a little speck in the whole scheme of things: nevertheless, you are being watched over, and watched over not only in terms of care but in terms of supervision to see you do nothing wrong. And there was this idea, and my generation got it very early, that there would be two judgments at the end of your life. First, at the end of your particular life, you would be whipped away into eternity and you would undergo a

particular judgment; your own life would be scanned, and rewards or punishments, or atonement, would be the result of that. Then again at the end of time, there would be a general judgment, and the whole thing would be ratified on a larger scale. Anybody who undergoes that is marked by it forever, I think. And no matter what kind of secularization occurs, there is a huge coordinate established for consciousness from the beginning, that sense of the outer shimmering rim of everything always being there in your imagination. Maybe that explains it—the soul being whipped away and the roof coming off and you being exposed to that infinity that occurs after the death of your parents.

Wachtel: You mention that this foundation was so strong regardless of the secularization that occurred later, but were you a believer at the time?

Heaney: Of course I was a believer. I don't know what I believe anymore, but I was part of the Irish Catholic machinery until my late teens, early twenties, definitely. The matter of the sacraments, transubstantiation for example, gave me trouble at a certain stage. But the idea that you could gain merit through a system of grace and you could gain merit for other people, that self-denial had a spiritual meaning, and that there was a whole supernatural economy, that had strong appeal to me. Of course you dwell in doubts, as John Keats says, and you can dwell with doubts as well as with beliefs, but I think that all that was shaken. When you left the church atmosphere and grew into adulthood, at university, you were between worlds again. You knew that you belonged in a Catholic, medieval, Chaucerian, Dantesque world, and at the same time you were dwelling in a post-Freudian, post-D. H. Lawrence world. One part of you had the experience of going to confession and confessing sins of impurity, the other part of you is writing essays about Lawrence and commending the kind of dark gods and the sensual realities of life that he expressed.

Wachtel: I have to ask you, did you ever say to your father that you loved him?

Heaney: How do you know that's my father? [*laughs*]

Wachtel: You're right. Guilty as charged.

Heaney: I don't remember. That kind of language would have been much suspect. We knew love. It wasn't a matter of declaring it. It was proven.

Wachtel: From your descriptions of home, there wasn't a lot of reading material at hand. When did you first become interested in poetry?

Heaney: Well, poetry as "poetry." Early on I was familiar with recitation. We had little concerts at home as children, where we recited poems we'd learned at school.

Then at Christmas, and at Easter, elder friends of my father's and mother's would be in, and there would be sing-songs; and as I came into adolescence I would be asked to do a recitation. I knew several, such as "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" from Robert Service, "The Spell of the Yukon," "The Cremation of Sam McGee," and then an Irish writer called Percy French who wrote that kind of thing also.

But it was when I went to secondary school, I suppose, and began to get into English literature and poetry as a subject, that something came alive in me to the language, something wakened or was stirred, especially by poets like John Keats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and so on. In university, that conscious relish of language became stronger, but I was always shy of "poetry." I didn't quite know what it was. And I think it was right to be shy of it, because nobody knows quite what it is. I'm still not sure. I wrote some poems as every literary undergraduate does, but it wasn't until I was in my twenty-second or twenty-third year, 1962, that "that something" started in me. I've said this often, but it came from reading poetry by Patrick Kavanagh, an Irish poet with the same kind of background as myself, a wonderful sudden burst of energy from him; and likewise from Ted Hughes, who again touched on subjects that I thought were known only to me, such as dead pigs lying in barrows, and bulls in outhouses, and barns and so on. So that was, as they say, permission. As an undergraduate at Queen's University, of course I had been lectured on contemporary poetry, and I had read Eliot, I had read Auden. But I had also swallowed the standard line that contemporary poetry was urban, ironical, detached. I mean, the intonations of Eliot I could hear as a listener, but they didn't enter me or waken anything in me in the way these other voices did. So once I started in 1962, I was bitten and kept going back for more.

Wachtel: When you were writing as an undergraduate, you went under the name of Incertus or Uncertain, and then when you got this kind of affirmation to trust your own experience of rural life through, as you say, Ted Hughes or Patrick Kavanagh or even Robert Frost, it gave you this permission. But you say that no place in the world prides itself more on its vigilance and realism than Northern Ireland, and I wondered how you felt that influence on your own work.

Heaney: It would be very hard for me to analyze that. I take it that I am vigilant myself and a bit skeptical, and I hope merrily so, so that's part of the makeup. And allowing yourself to get through that is part of the action. I think that self-forgetfulness, self-entrancement, is part of the action of writing, certainly of writing verse. To dwell silently on something within yourself, to forget that you are there watching yourself in action, that's the achievement and that's the desire. And I think nowadays a lot of people really experience that in front of a screen. A computer screen is an entrancement device. It's kind of hypnotic, that grey glow. Not that I would begin poems on the screen. I have a connection to the shaft of the fountain pen still. I like to get started on white paper with ink gleaming, and then I like the reward of putting it out onto the screen and then hard copy and then fiddle away with that.

Wachtel: You were part of a literary world in Northern Ireland for a while; there was a certain poetry scene in the 1960s and 1970s. Then you went to California for a year. But when you came back to Northern Ireland, you gave up teaching and moved to the south, to the Republic of Ireland. It made front-page news in *The Irish Times*. What prompted this move in 1972?

Heaney: I had a year in California that meant a lot to me, I have to say. That was 1970, 1971, right in the middle of the Vietnam War, the middle of the countercultural moment. Terrific protests. The whole of that Bay area was really a countercultural area. You had the Black Panthers, you had the Hare Krishna, you had the loose garments, you had the illegal substances. You had all kinds of fragrances on that campus, all kinds of rhetoric, all kinds of protest. And the poets were very much involved. The year I was there, Robert Bly was up in Inverness, just a little north of Berkeley; Gary Snyder was there, Robert Duncan. When I came back to Belfast, I was first of all fortified in the knowledge that I could go back to the English department, because the last thing the chairman said to me was, "If you ever need to come back, you'd be very welcome." There was that security blanket, and then there was a feeling of vocation that had grown in me during that year. I taught for another year in Queen's University and finished my third book, and I got a feeling that it was time to declare myself as a writer. So I thought, okay, go for it. But there was no immediate plan at all that we would go to the Republic of Ireland. That early summer of 1972, Marie and I were driving around the north—County Derry, County Tyrone, County Antrim—looking at places. Then from Canada, we got a letter from our dear friend Ann Saddlemyer, who was then teaching in the University of Toronto at Massey College. She had this cottage in County Wicklow in the Republic, south of Dublin. It was on the old Synge estate—Ann was a scholar of Synge's work, an editor. She wrote, "I heard on the grapevine that you're thinking of leaving the academy for a while and looking for a house. I've got this cottage in County Wicklow." So at Easter, Marie and I and the kids went down to that cottage and we decided, yes, let's make a go of it. I gave in my resignation, and in the month of August we saddled up, filled a van, and went down to the Glanmore cottage, stayed there for four years, and didn't go back to Queen's, didn't go back to the north to dwell there at all. So it was a happy mixture of Ann's philanthropy, as it were, and the growth point in our own lives.

Wachtel: Once you did make the move, did it change how you saw the political situation? What effect did it have on your family, to move to the Republic?

Heaney: I don't think it had very much effect in terms of politics or anything like that. I mean, if I had been in the north, my attitude would have been the same. I wanted the kids, really, to have the kind of childhood I'd had, I suppose; to share the feeling of growing up behind hedges and having eye-level contact with bird's nests and leaves and flowers and so on. And there was something in myself that relished the frugality of life in the cottage, something that belonged in my first life, but it wasn't a matter of fleeing the north. We lived as easily in Belfast as ever we had lived in the years leading up to the Troubles. It wasn't a matter of feeling

scared or being hunted out of the place or shaking the dust of the place off. It was very much to do with the option and the freedom of making a choice, embracing something different. In a sense, it was the first choice I deliberately made. I've often said that Marie and I, we were part of the scholarship generation. We got the scholarship to secondary school, we got the scholarship to the university, we got the scholarship to the teaching training college, we went into teaching, we got engaged, we got the mortgage, we got the house, we got the young family, and there we were. California was the first step off the conveyor belt, and when we came back we stepped farther off it. So that was a freedom.

Wachtel: There are references to the Troubles in some of your work, but it's not often there as a central focus. How do you see the responsibility of poets to the politics of their time?

Heaney: I think that is a question that I kept answering ad nauseum between about 1969 or 1970 and 1989. Almost everything that I've written in prose and much that's in verse is about that question. Poets of the 1930s in England especially felt that. I mean, Spender, Auden, and Louis MacNeice—who's an Irish poet of course, but part of that British generation—they had to deal with the Spanish Civil War, the rise of fascism, and so on. They were lyric poets, they had private subjects. They had love, Eros, sex, time, childhood, and yet there was the big war and the need for commitment. Communism was flowering as an ideology. The attraction of working for the wretched of the earth was deep, moral, and compelling. So what was the private lyric poet to do? Was he or she to just keep to the lyric matter of the self and beauty, or was there a bigger obligation? I grew up with an orthodoxy inculcated at the university that these poets made a mistake when they embraced anything propagandist or political. I think there was a confusion, perhaps, in my mind and in the minds of some of my teachers between the propagandist and the political. Political was kind of inculcated as a bad word in relation to art and poetry. Our great exemplar W. B. Yeats was ever against "opinion" in verse, but he was never afraid to deliver opinion. I realized later on that his rhetoric and his practice were slightly at odds. So over the years, I think we had to learn how to incorporate the matter of the Troubles—bombs, killings, the actual landscape of contemporary Ulster—into the kinds of things we were writing. It's a far cry from Mossbawn, if you like, from the big noise of the shunting of an engine to the explosions of car bombs rattling the windows in Belfast; Bloody Sunday to Bloody Friday, both occurring in 1972. None of us quite had got the way of handling it. Many years later, I found a way of letting some people speak in a poem called "Station Island," which was a kind of a dialogue between a poet/protagonist and various ghosts—some who had been killed in the Troubles, some who had been involved in Irish life in the nineteenth century, and indeed the shade of James Joyce, who warns against too much side-taking, not to be the voice of any people, but to be your own voice.

Wachtel: And when you look back now, not that you need to spend much time revisiting it in your own work, but do you feel you walked the right line? I mean, it was at some times, I think, a fairly difficult path to negotiate.

Heaney: Well, there's nothing that strikes me as dishonest in anything that was written. It may not have pleased everybody, but it pleased me enough to be going on with, and that's the best you can do as a writer, I think [*laughs*]—to write honestly, honestly in terms of the subject and in terms of your attitudes, and in terms of who and what you are. And honestly in terms of your makings, in terms of the art, that it is not faked up, that it belongs as a true imaginative response, that it isn't generated out of will but arises out of something more deeply lodged in yourself. I feel that anything that is in the books, mistaken or not, middling writing or not, good or bad, got there like that and I have no anxiety about changing it or getting rid of it.

Wachtel: So much has happened since that time and in more recent years for the good. How do you feel now? How do you see the future for Northern Ireland?

Heaney: I think that the new institutions are important, but I don't see any great love-in occurring between the two communities for a good while. The main thing would be that in the new local parliament the opposing sides would find a way of talking at least, not bogging themselves down in ideological or sectarian fury again. I think the signs are middlingly good for that. We've moved from the atrocious to the vigilant, small-minded messiness of tit-for-tat politics, and that is an advance. So I am hopeful, yes, and certainly it's a far better prospect now than it was thirty, forty, fifty years ago even. Things have moved on. Little changes are very important, little changes in the individual breast. And getting the institutions up, if not running, at least going at pedestrian speed, has been a great achievement, a great change.

Wachtel: There are so many rich images in your work. I'm wondering, how does a poem start for you?

Heaney: Almost always it starts from some memory, something you'd forgotten that comes up like a living gift of presence. Robert Frost said in his introduction to his *Collected Poems*, "like giants we are always hurling experience ahead of us to pave the future with against the day when we may want to strike a line of purpose across from somewhere." That is generally the way things happen with me. The memory comes up and if I'm lucky, it attaches itself, it crosses itself with some other thing. I mean, I had that poem about playing trains on the sofa in Mossbawn. It luckily didn't end up just a little nostalgic recreation of happy families on the sofa in the 1940s. It crossed with that sense that gradually came as one grew, how lucky we were not to be living the terrible, tragic life of others in mainland Europe and in Britain. The shadow that we didn't know was there could be recognized retrospectively. That is the kind of poem I really like: the stimulus in memory, but the import, hopefully, more than just the content of memory. But without memory, I don't think I could move. Mnemnosyne, I believe, is supposed to be the mother of the Muses.

Wachtel: In your Nobel lecture in 1995, you credit poetry for its "truth to life," in every sense of that phrase. What were you thinking in terms of the senses of that phrase?

Heaney: First of all, in a poet like Frost, say, it describes the actual, it has a documentary quality. But that's not the only sense in which you can be true to life. You can be true to it in terms of moral insight, in terms of ethical judgment, in realizing the imaginative dimensions of things. You can be true to it the way Wallace Stevens is true to it in a late poem like "The River of Rivers in Connecticut," or the way he's true to it in an early, crazy, little lyric like "The bucks went clattering . . ." I've forgotten which state they go clattering through. Or "The Emperor of Ice Cream," this kind of grand flourish—sportive, elegant, just play for its own sake in the domain of language. If you take a contemporary American writer like John Ashbery, who a lot of people had, and probably still have, difficulty with—kind of whimsical, non sequitur kind of writing, channel surfing the language, going zigzag from sentence to sentence—he is true to life insofar as that is the way people's minds are now, hopping from thing to thing. It's the way the world is, attention spans shortened. The world is full of little sound bites, clamours. There's very little silence on earth for anyone anymore. It takes a lot of effort to find a place to walk silently. Ashbery registers the truth-to-lifeness of the new world we live in. So I think it's not just a matter of poetry being true in a novelistic kind of way, reporting what happens, but it's true to the nature of reality, to the balance between the imagined and the endured, between the moral and the imagined and so on. That must be what I meant when I said it.

Wachtel: Each of John Ashbery's separate segments is very recognizable and you can understand it. It's only when you try to make sense of the whole thing that each piece is somewhat discreet. I was wondering, also, how did winning the Nobel change your life?

Heaney: I don't really know the answer to that, to tell you the truth. I mean, it changed it in terms of invitations to do things, in terms of pressure of the mail, in terms of saying no to many things. And in Ireland, because we are a small country, the number of invitations to do things isn't just confined to the literary. For example, I'm going to speak at an international conference of gerontologists in September. So that kind of thing changed, but I don't think it radically changed my sense of myself or what I was about as a writer. I mean, I assume that it was given for work that was done rather than work I was going to do. This happened to me in 1995. At that stage, I was already fairly busy and fairly exposed to the world, and fairly well-known and scrutinized. Living through the Troubles as a writer in the north, living as someone who's part of that generation of poets—Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, and so on—we were constantly under scrutiny. We were under political scrutiny, we were under pressure, we were interviewed. I think the kind of attention that came with the Nobel Prize wasn't any more acute or exacting than what we had suffered ourselves already, so I don't think I'm misrepresenting my response to the prize. What is true is this, that other people see you differently once this garland is hung on you. That's another matter, but that's their . . .

Wachtel: That's their problem. [*laughs*]

Heaney: Yeah.

Wachtel: You had a stroke in 2006, which you say wasn't exactly a brush with death. What was it?

Heaney: Well, it was wakening up one morning in County Donegal in a guest house where we had been at a party with friends the night before and not being able to get out of the bed, making moves and nothing happening. I was paralyzed on my left side. Luckily, our very good friends were there on the spot, one of them a physiotherapist, so she came in and had a kind of calm talk. The ambulance services came very quickly and I was snatched straight to the hospital, which was an hour away, and en route I was hooked up to a drip that was very good for the circulation and so on. So I went to hospital, was in intensive care for a day and a half, and then something terrific happened. My big toe moved on the left foot after a couple days. At that point I was brought by ambulance from the north, from Donegal, about 120 miles down to Dublin. I was in a general hospital there for a week. And then I went to a wonderful rehab hospital for about four weeks, and that was it. I learned balance, learned to walk, got refurbished, and got tablets and instructions.

Wachtel: And you didn't lose speech and it didn't affect your mind at all?

Heaney: No, I was extremely lucky in that way. Didn't lose speech, didn't lose memory, and emerged unmarked. But for a while it was scary enough when I just wondered if I'd remain paralyzed. I was blessed, really. But it was a changing experience all right. I cancelled every appointment I had for readings, lectures, and so on for a year, and that had a good effect. It made me much more cautious about accepting invitations and made me realize how much I was on the road and how I should change my ways a bit. So, it had that good effect.

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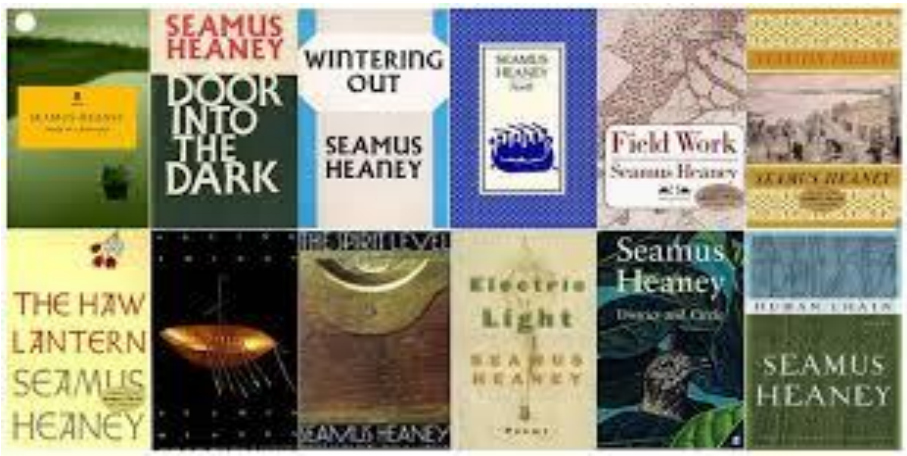

17 Aug 1932

11 Aug 2018

VS Naipaul

Nobel Prize in Literature 2001

Born: 17 August 1932, Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago
Died: 11 August 2018, London, United Kingdom
Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom

Prize motivation:

"for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2001/naipaul/facts/}

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On V. S. Naipaul from Pegasos Author's Calendar

Nobel Diploma

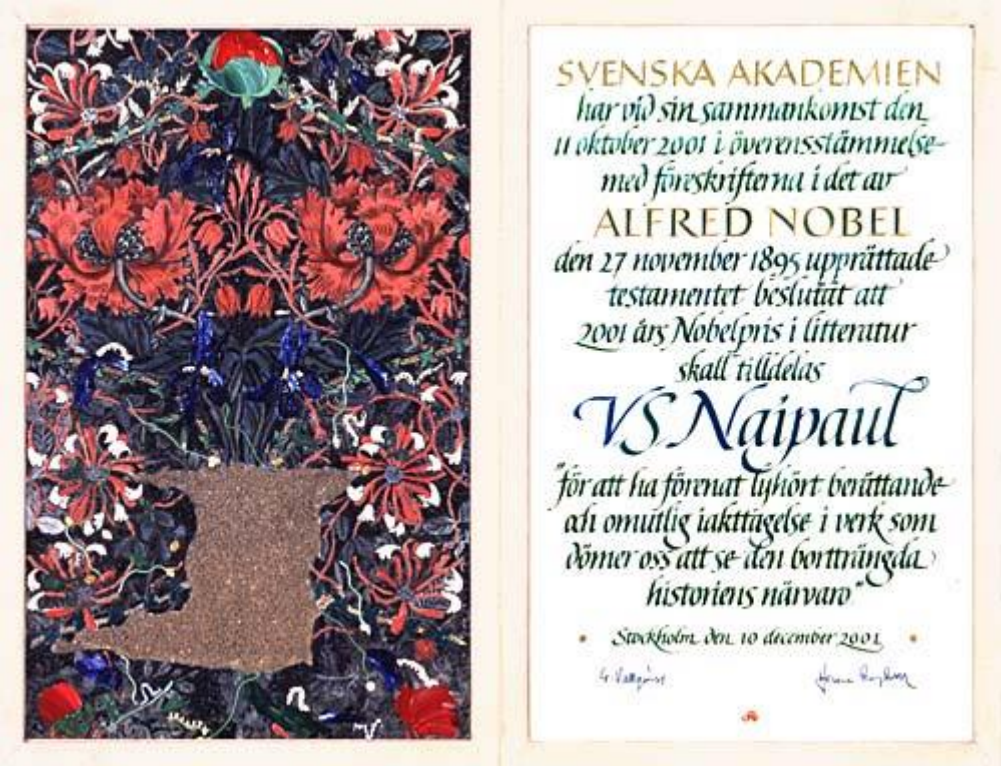
SVENSKA AKADEMIEN
har vid sin sammankomst den
11 oktober 2001 i överensstämmelse
med föreskrifterna i det av
ALFRED NOBEL
den 27 november 1895 upprättade
testamentet beslutat att
2001 års Nobelpris i litteratur
skall tilldelas
V S Naipaul
för att ha förenat lyhört berättande
och omutlig iakttagelse i verk som
tvingar oss att se den bortträngda
historiens närvaro
Stockholm den 10 december 2001

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Photo Gallery

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The Nobel Prize Award Ceremony 2001

A Summary

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2001/award-video/

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Watch the 2001 Nobel Laureates in Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine and Literature receive the Nobel Prize

medal and diploma, and the Economics Laureates the Economics Prize medal and diploma during ceremonies at the Stockholm Concert Hall in Sweden, 10 December 2001.

Read the Opening address

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Award Ceremony Speech

Translation of the Swedish text.

Dr. Horace Engdahl delivering the Presentation Speech for the 2001 Nobel Prize in Literature at the Stockholm Concert Hall.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Honoured Nobel Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the Middle Ages, master craftsmen worked in full view in the street or in an open workshop, so that prospective buyers could see that the materials they use were geniune and that no defects were hidden beneath a luxurious surface treatment. Similarly, as a mature writer V. S. Naipaul has allowed us to scrutinize his craft and the conditions surrounding it. He has candidly described how, as a beginner, he neglected to obtain knowledge of what he saw and falsified his experiences in order to live up to the perception of literature he had gained through his British schooling.

He knew at an early age that he had to write, but not what. His first book, *The Mystic Masseur,* appears very bold when read in the light of his

confessions about the awkward beginnings of his own career as a writer. The masseur/charlatan is the author's shadow and caricature, to which he exorcistically transfers his bizarre traits and imagined failures, something like Sartre did with the autodidact in *La Nausée.*

Naipaul was born on the West Indian island of Trinidad as a descendant of immigrant workers from India, in a milieu where peoples and cultures from four continents mixed. In his case, moving into literature presupposed irrevocably breaking away from these origins. Yet it was not until the moment when he decided to explore what he had abandoned that his writing took off. His childhood street set the tone for him. At first it was playful and immediate, but the subject grew in his hands. In the book that made him famous, *A House for Mr. Biswas,* he lent the profundity of the major novel to the wing-clipped characters in a Caribbean backwater and granted them dignity. Mr. Biswas, who bears traits of Naipaul's father, gained a place in the English literary gallery of immortal tragicomic heroes.

Naipaul's subsequent works examined, in ever wider circles, the forgotten historical circumstances that explain the author's background. He became an explorer, not of the wilderness but of societies – everywhere at home and a stranger, a Ulysses whose only Ithaca was his desk. Perhaps he is a witness from the freely circulating humanity of the future.

Naipaul has been praised for writing the best English in the market, and that may well be, but his view of style is reminiscent of Stendahl's, who believed a writer has failed if the reader remembers the words he has written: what should remain are his ideas. Naipaul is no worshipper of fantasy or utopia, no creator of alternative worlds. Dickens' ability to describe London with the open gaze and simplicity of a child is his declared ideal. He continues a critical direction in literature that distances itself from myth and expressive hyperbole. His text is permanently unrelenting, like a chill wind that will not stop blowing.

In *Reading and Writing,* an essay of great value in understanding his works, Naipaul relates his steadily growing doubts about the novel, the grand genre of the West. He describes how while working on his history of Trinidad, *The Loss of El Dorado,* he found in the archives traces of the native tribe that had given its name to the small city where he spent his first years, and how his perception of reality suddenly expanded. "Fiction by itself would not have taken me to this larger comprehension," he writes. The technique he adopted while working on *El Dorado* – unearthing from the documents the life stories of seemingly insignificant individuals – returns when he works with the notes from his journeys. The various literary forms he has tried – fictional narrative, autobiography, feature story and historical documentary – have eventually merged into a unique

genre, "prose in the style of Naipaul". By this innovation, he has enlarged the territory of literature.

One experience that seems to have been crucial to his literary method is his first encounter with India. He saw traces of a history that had been concealed from view when the champions of independence had to deny the misfortunes that had preceded the English: six hundred years of Muslim imperialism that deliberately destroyed the memory of earlier civilisations and plunged the Hindus into a helplessness similar to that of the American Indians. He studied R.K. Narayan's novels in the Indian setting and saw that their world is built around an emptiness that the author is incapable of dealing with: the forgotten defeat that turned people into dwarves among monumental ruins. Only an intact culture provides the background knowledge that makes the novel a reasonable form, Naipaul argues. He found that he had to cling to the authenticity of details and voices and abstain from fabulation, while continuing to give his material a literary shape. He became a collector of testimony.

This method presupposes the courage to seek out human phenomena that frighten every normal observer, the author included. But even when he reports from places where no hope seems to exist, the author's empathy makes itself felt in the acuity of his ear. He says he finds every person interesting, at least for the first few hours. He distinguishes individual fates beyond the dutiful idealization that controls our perception of the earth's ill-fated nations. He wants to understand the principle of every person's life, the decisive thing that makes him what he is. He records the relationship between pretension and reality, two contours that never really cover each other and never completely diverge.

Decay and disappearance are a fundamental theme in Naipaul's writings – but without grief, rather as something that makes existence bearable. The English landscape that he discovers in *The Enigma of Arrival* is the ruin of an age of greatness, and at last he feels at home! He says that even as a child, he has pondered that he was born into a world past its climax. Yet his books are not negative. His phrasing embodies an absence of resignation that keeps melancholy at bay and shares with the reader the pure joy of intelligence.

Naipaul has praised the West for having recognized the right to individual endeavour and for its diffidence. The core of his devotion to European civilisation is that it was the only one of the alternative cultures that made it possible for him to become a writer.

Sir Vidia!

Your life as a writer calls to mind what Alfred Nobel said of himself: "My homeland is where I work, and I work everywhere." In every place, you have remained yourself, faithful to your instinct. Your books trace the outline of an individual quest of unusual dimensions. Like a Nemo piloting a craft of your own design, without representing anyone or anything, you have manifested the independence of literature. I would like to convey to you the warm congratulations of the Swedish Academy as I now request you to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature from the hands of His Majesty the King.

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Prize Presentation

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2001/naipaul/prize-presentation/

Watch a video clip of the 2001 Nobel Laureate in Literature, V. S. Naipaul, receiving his Nobel Prize medal and diploma during the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony at the Concert Hall in Stockholm, Sweden, on 10 December 2001.

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Nobel Prize Lecture

7 December 2001

Sir V. S. Naipaul delivered his Nobel Lecture in Börssalen at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm, 7 December 2001. He was introduced by Horace Engdahl, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy.

Two Worlds

This is unusual for me. I have given readings and not lectures. I have told people who ask for lectures that I have no lecture to give. And that is true. It might seem strange that a man who has dealt in words and emotions and ideas for nearly fifty years shouldn't have a few to spare, so to speak.

But everything of value about me is in my books. Whatever extra there is in me at any given moment isn't fully formed. I am hardly aware of it; it awaits the next book. It will – with luck – come to me during the actual writing, and it will take me by surprise. That element of surprise is what I look for when I am writing. It is my way of judging what I am doing – which is never an easy thing to do.

Proust has written with great penetration of the difference between the writer as writer and the writer as a social being. You will find his thoughts in some of his essays in *Against Sainte-Beuve*, a book reconstituted from his early papers.

The nineteenth-century French critic Sainte-Beuve believed that to understand a writer it was necessary to know as much as possible about the exterior man, the details of his life. It is a beguiling method, using the man to illuminate the work. It might seem unassailable. But Proust is able very convincingly to pick it apart. "This method of Sainte-Beuve," Proust writes, "ignores what a very slight degree of self-acquaintance teaches us: that a book is the product of a different self from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices. If we would try to understand that particular self, it is by searching our own bosoms, and trying to reconstruct it there, that we may arrive at it."

Those words of Proust should be with us whenever we are reading the biography of a writer – or the biography of anyone who depends on what can be called inspiration. All the details of the life and the quirks and the friendships can be laid out for us, but the mystery of the writing will remain. No amount of documentation, however fascinating, can take us there. The biography of a writer – or even the autobiography – will always have this incompleteness.

Proust is a master of happy amplification, and I would like to go back to *Against Sainte-Beuve* just for a little. "In fact," Proust writes, "it is the secretions of one's innermost self, written in solitude and for oneself alone that one gives to the public. What one bestows on private life – in conversation…or in those drawing-room essays that are scarcely more than conversation in print – is the product of a quite superficial self, not of the innermost self which one can only recover by putting aside the world and the self that frequents the world."

When he wrote that, Proust had not yet found the subject that was to lead him to the happiness of his great literary labour. And you can tell from what I have quoted that he was a man trusting to his intuition and waiting for luck. I have quoted these words before in other places. The reason is that they define how I have gone about my business. I have trusted to intuition.

I did it at the beginning. I do it even now. I have no idea how things might turn out, where in my writing I might go next. I have trusted to my intuition to find the subjects, and I have written intuitively. I have an idea when I start, I have a shape; but I will fully understand what I have written only after some years.

I said earlier that everything of value about me is in my books. I will go further now. I will say I am the sum of my books. Each book, intuitively sensed and, in the case of fiction, intuitively worked out, stands on what has gone before, and grows out of it. I feel that at any stage of my literary career it could have been said that the last book contained all the others.

It's been like this because of my background. My background is at once exceedingly simple and exceedingly confused. I was born in Trinidad. It is a small island in the mouth of the great Orinoco river of Venezuela. So Trinidad is not strictly of South America, and not strictly of the Caribbean. It was developed as a New World plantation colony, and when I was born in 1932 it had a population of about 400,000. Of this, about 150,000 were Indians, Hindus and Muslims, nearly all of peasant origin, and nearly all from the Gangetic plain.

This was my very small community. The bulk of this migration from India occurred after 1880. The deal was like this. People indentured themselves for five years to serve on the estates. At the end of this time they were given a small piece of land, perhaps five acres, or a passage back to India. In 1917, because of agitation by Gandhi and others, the indenture system was abolished. And perhaps because of this, or for some other reason, the pledge of land or repatriation was dishonoured for many of the later arrivals. These people were absolutely destitute. They slept in the streets of Port of Spain, the capital. When I was a child I saw them. I suppose I didn't know they were destitute – I suppose that idea came much later – and they made no impression on me. This was part of the cruelty of the plantation colony.

I was born in a small country town called Chaguanas, two or three miles inland from the Gulf of Paria. Chaguanas was a strange name, in spelling and pronunciation, and many of the Indian people – they were in the majority in the area – preferred to call it by the Indian caste name of Chauhan.

I was thirty-four when I found out about the name of my birthplace. I was living in London, had been living in England for sixteen years. I was writing my ninth book. This was a history of Trinidad, a human history, trying to re-create people and their stories. I used to go to the British Museum to

read the Spanish documents about the region. These documents – recovered from the Spanish archives – were copied out for the British government in the 1890s at the time of a nasty boundary dispute with Venezuela. The documents begin in 1530 and end with the disappearance of the Spanish Empire.

I was reading about the foolish search for El Dorado, and the murderous interloping of the English hero, Sir Walter Raleigh. In 1595 he raided Trinidad, killed all the Spaniards he could, and went up the Orinoco looking for El Dorado. He found nothing, but when he went back to England he said he had. He had a piece of gold and some sand to show. He said he had hacked the gold out of a cliff on the bank of the Orinoco. The Royal Mint said that the sand he asked them to assay was worthless, and other people said that he had bought the gold beforehand from North Africa. He then published a book to prove his point, and for four centuries people have believed that Raleigh had found something. The magic of Raleigh's book, which is really quite difficult to read, lay in its very long title: *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana, with a relation of the great and golden city of Manoa (which the Spaniards call El Dorado) and the provinces of Emeria, Aromaia, Amapaia, and other countries, with their rivers adjoining*. How real it sounds! And he had hardly been on the main Orinoco.

And then, as sometimes happens with confidence men, Raleigh was caught by his own fantasies. Twenty-one years later, old and ill, he was let out of his London prison to go to Guiana and find the gold mines he said he had found. In this fraudulent venture his son died. The father, for the sake of his reputation, for the sake of his lies, had sent his son to his death. And then Raleigh, full of grief, with nothing left to live for, went back to London to be executed.

The story should have ended there. But Spanish memories were long – no doubt because their imperial correspondence was so slow: it might take up to two years for a letter from Trinidad to be read in Spain. Eight years afterwards the Spaniards of Trinidad and Guiana were still settling their scores with the Gulf Indians. One day in the British Museum I read a letter from the King of Spain to the governor of Trinidad. It was dated 12 October 1625.

"I asked you," the King wrote, "to give me some information about a certain nation of Indians called Chaguanes, who you say number above one thousand, and are of such bad disposition that it was they who led the English when they captured the town. Their crime hasn't been punished because forces were not available for this purpose and because the Indians acknowledge no master save their own will. You have decided to give them

a punishment. Follow the rules I have given you; and let me know how you get on."

What the governor did I don't know. I could find no further reference to the Chaguanes in the documents in the Museum. Perhaps there were other documents about the Chaguanes in the mountain of paper in the Spanish archives in Seville which the British government scholars missed or didn't think important enough to copy out. What is true is that the little tribe of over a thousand – who would have been living on both sides of the Gulf of Paria – disappeared so completely that no one in the town of Chaguanas or Chauhan knew anything about them. And the thought came to me in the Museum that I was the first person since 1625 to whom that letter of the king of Spain had a real meaning. And that letter had been dug out of the archives only in 1896 or 1897. A disappearance, and then the silence of centuries.

We lived on the Chaguanes' land. Every day in term time – I was just beginning to go to school – I walked from my grandmother's house – past the two or three main-road stores, the Chinese parlour, the Jubilee Theatre, and the high-smelling little Portuguese factory that made cheap blue soap and cheap yellow soap in long bars that were put out to dry and harden in the mornings – every day I walked past these eternal-seeming things – to the Chaguanas Government School. Beyond the school was sugar-cane, estate land, going up to the Gulf of Paria. The people who had been dispossessed would have had their own kind of agriculture, their own calendar, their own codes, their own sacred sites. They would have understood the Orinoco-fed currents in the Gulf of Paria. Now all their skills and everything else about them had been obliterated.

The world is always in movement. People have everywhere at some time been dispossessed. I suppose I was shocked by this discovery in 1967 about my birthplace because I had never had any idea about it. But that was the way most of us lived in the agricultural colony, blindly. There was no plot by the authorities to keep us in our darkness. I think it was more simply that the knowledge wasn't there. The kind of knowledge about the Chaguanes would not have been considered important, and it would not have been easy to recover. They were a small tribe, and they were aboriginal. Such people – on the mainland, in what was called B.G., British Guiana – were known to us, and were a kind of joke. People who were loud and ill-behaved were known, to all groups in Trinidad, I think, as *warrahoons*. I used to think it was a made-up word, made up to suggest wildness. It was only when I began to travel in Venezuela, in my forties, that I understood that a word like that was the name of a rather large aborginal tribe there.

There was a vague story when I was a child – and to me now it is an unbearably affecting story – that at certain times aboriginal people came across in canoes from the mainland, walked through the forest in the south of the island, and at a certain spot picked some kind of fruit or made some kind of offering, and then went back across the Gulf of Paria to the sodden estuary of the Orinoco. The rite must have been of enormous importance to have survived the upheavals of four hundred years, and the extinction of the aborigines in Trinidad. Or perhaps – though Trinidad and Venezuela have a common flora – they had come only to pick a particular kind of fruit. I don't know. I can't remember anyone inquiring. And now the memory is all lost; and that sacred site, if it existed, has become common ground.

What was past was past. I suppose that was the general attitude. And we Indians, immigrants from India, had that attitude to the island. We lived for the most part ritualised lives, and were not yet capable of self-assessment, which is where learning begins. Half of us on this land of the Chaguanes were pretending – perhaps not pretending, perhaps only feeling, never formulating it as an idea – that we had brought a kind of India with us, which we could, as it were, unroll like a carpet on the flat land.

My grandmother's house in Chaguanas was in two parts. The front part, of bricks and plaster, was painted white. It was like a kind of Indian house, with a grand balustraded terrace on the upper floor, and a prayer-room on the floor above that. It was ambitious in its decorative detail, with lotus capitals on pillars, and sculptures of Hindu deities, all done by people working only from a memory of things in India. In Trinidad it was an architectural oddity. At the back of this house, and joined to it by an upper bridge room, was a timber building in the French Caribbean style. The entrance gate was at the side, between the two houses. It was a tall gate of corrugated iron on a wooden frame. It made for a fierce kind of privacy.

So as a child I had this sense of two worlds, the world outside that tall corrugated-iron gate, and the world at home – or, at any rate, the world of my grandmother's house. It was a remnant of our caste sense, the thing that excluded and shut out. In Trinidad, where as new arrivals we were a disadvantaged community, that excluding idea was a kind of protection; it enabled us – for the time being, and only for the time being – to live in our own way and according to our own rules, to live in our own fading India. It made for an extraordinary self-centredness. We looked inwards; we lived out our days; the world outside existed in a kind of darkness; we inquired about nothing.

There was a Muslim shop next door. The little loggia of my grandmother's shop ended against his blank wall. The man's name was Mian. That was all

that we knew of him and his family. I suppose we must have seen him, but I have no mental picture of him now. We knew nothing of Muslims. This idea of strangeness, of the thing to be kept outside, extended even to other Hindus. For example, we ate rice in the middle of the day, and wheat in the evenings. There were some extraordinary people who reversed this natural order and ate rice in the evenings. I thought of these people as strangers – you must imagine me at this time as under seven, because when I was seven all this life of my grandmother's house in Chaguanas came to an end for me. We moved to the capital, and then to the hills to the northwest.

But the habits of mind engendered by this shut-in and shutting-out life lingered for quite a while. If it were not for the short stories my father wrote I would have known almost nothing about the general life of our Indian community. Those stories gave me more than knowledge. They gave me a kind of solidity. They gave me something to stand on in the world. I cannot imagine what my mental picture would have been without those stories.

The world outside existed in a kind of darkness; and we inquired about nothing. I was just old enough to have some idea of the Indian epics, the Ramayana in particular. The children who came five years or so after me in our extended family didn't have this luck. No one taught us Hindi. Sometimes someone wrote out the alphabet for us to learn, and that was that; we were expected to do the rest ourselves. So, as English penetrated, we began to lose our language. My grandmother's house was full of religion; there were many ceremonies and readings, some of which went on for days. But no one explained or translated for us who could no longer follow the language. So our ancestral faith receded, became mysterious, not pertinent to our day-to-day life.

We made no inquiries about India or about the families people had left behind. When our ways of thinking had changed, and we wished to know, it was too late. I know nothing of the people on my father's side; I know only that some of them came from Nepal. Two years ago a kind Nepalese who liked my name sent me a copy of some pages from an 1872 gazetteer-like British work about India, *Hindu Castes and Tribes as Represented in Benares*; the pages listed – among a multitude of names -those groups of Nepalese in the holy city of Banaras who carried the name Naipal. That is all that I have.

Away from this world of my grandmother's house, where we ate rice in the middle of the day and wheat in the evenings, there was the great unknown – in this island of only 400,000 people. There were the African or African-derived people who were the majority. They were policemen; they were teachers. One of them was my very first teacher at the Chaguanas Government School; I remembered her with adoration for years. There was

the capital, where very soon we would all have to go for education and jobs, and where we would settle permanently, among strangers. There were the white people, not all of them English; and the Portuguese and the Chinese, at one time also immigrants like us. And, more mysterious than these, were the people we called Spanish, '*pagnols*, mixed people of warm brown complexions who came from the Spanish time, before the island was detached from Venezuela and the Spanish Empire – a kind of history absolutely beyond my child's comprehension.

To give you this idea of my background, I have had to call on knowledge and ideas that came to me much later, principally from my writing. As a child I knew almost nothing, nothing beyond what I had picked up in my grandmother's house. All children, I suppose, come into the world like that, not knowing who they are. But for the French child, say, that knowledge is waiting. That knowledge will be all around them. It will come indirectly from the conversation of their elders. It will be in the newspapers and on the radio. And at school the work of generations of scholars, scaled down for school texts, will provide some idea of France and the French.

In Trinidad, bright boy though I was, I was surrounded by areas of darkness. School elucidated nothing for me. I was crammed with facts and formulas. Everything had to be learned by heart; everything was abstract for me. Again, I do not believe there was a plan or plot to make our courses like that. What we were getting was standard school learning. In another setting it would have made sense. And at least some of the failing would have lain in me. With my limited social background it was hard for me imaginatively to enter into other societies or societies that were far away. I loved the idea of books, but I found it hard to read them. I got on best with things like Andersen and Aesop, timeless, placeless, not excluding. And when at last in the sixth form, the highest form in the college, I got to like some of our literature texts – Moliere, Cyrano de Bergerac – I suppose it was because they had the quality of the fairytale.

When I became a writer those areas of darkness around me as a child became my subjects. The land; the aborigines; the New World; the colony; the history; India; the Muslim world, to which I also felt myself related; Africa; and then England, where I was doing my writing. That was what I meant when I said that my books stand one on the other, and that I am the sum of my books. That was what I meant when I said that my background, the source and prompting of my work, was at once exceedingly simple and exceedingly complicated. You will have seen how simple it was in the country town of Chaguanas. And I think you will understand how complicated it was for me as a writer. Especially in the beginning, when the literary models I had – the models given me by what I can only call my false learning – dealt with entirely different societies. But perhaps you might feel that the material was so rich it would have been no

trouble at all to get started and to go on. What I have said about the background, however, comes from the knowledge I acquired with my writing. And you must believe me when I tell you that the pattern in my work has only become clear in the last two months or so. Passages from old books were read to me, and I saw the connections. Until then the greatest trouble for me was to describe my writing to people, to say what I had done.

I said I was an intuitive writer. That was so, and that remains so now, when I am nearly at the end. I never had a plan. I followed no system. I worked intuitively. My aim every time was do a book, to create something that would be easy and interesting to read. At every stage I could only work within my knowledge and sensibility and talent and world-view. Those things developed book by book. And I had to do the books I did because there were no books about those subjects to give me what I wanted. I had to clear up my world, elucidate it, for myself.

I had to go to the documents in the British Museum and elsewhere, to get the true feel of the history of the colony. I had to travel to India because there was no one to tell me what the India my grandparents had come from was like. There was the writing of Nehru and Gandhi; and strangely it was Gandhi, with his South African experience, who gave me more, but not enough. There was Kipling; there were British-Indian writers like John Masters (going very strong in the 1950s, with an announced plan, later abandoned, I fear, for thirty-five connected novels about British India); there were romances by women writers. The few Indian writers who had come up at that time were middle-class people, town-dwellers; they didn't know the India we had come from.

And when that Indian need was satisfied, others became apparent: Africa, South America, the Muslim world. The aim has always been to fill out my world picture, and the purpose comes from my childhood: to make me more at ease with myself. Kind people have sometimes written asking me to go and write about Germany, say, or China. But there is much good writing already about those places; I am willing to depend there on the writing that exists. And those subjects are for other people. Those were not the areas of darkness I felt about me as a child. So, just as there is a development in my work, a development in narrative skill and knowledge and sensibility, so there is a kind of unity, a focus, though I might appear to be going in many directions.

When I began I had no idea of the way ahead. I wished only to do a book. I was trying to write in England, where I stayed on after my years at the university, and it seemed to me that my experience was very thin, was not truly of the stuff of books. I could find in no book anything that came near

my background. The young French or English person who wished to write would have found any number of models to set him on his way. I had none. My father's stories about our Indian community belonged to the past. My world was quite different. It was more urban, more mixed. The simple physical details of the chaotic life of our extended family – sleeping rooms or sleeping spaces, eating times, the sheer number of people – seemed impossible to handle. There was too much to be explained, both about my home life and about the world outside. And at the same time there was also too much about us – like our own ancestry and history – that I didn't know.

At last one day there came to me the idea of starting with the Port of Spain street to which we had moved from Chaguanas. There was no big corrugated-iron gate shutting out the world there. The life of the street was open to me. It was an intense pleasure for me to observe it from the verandah. This street life was what I began to write about. I wished to write fast, to avoid too much self-questioning, and so I simplified. I suppressed the child-narrator's background. I ignored the racial and social complexities of the street. I explained nothing. I stayed at ground level, so to speak. I presented people only as they appeared on the street. I wrote a story a day. The first stories were very short. I was worried about the material lasting long enough. But then the writing did its magic. The material began to present itself to me from many sources. The stories became longer; they couldn't be written in a day. And then the inspiration, which at one stage had seemed very easy, rolling me along, came to an end. But a book had been written, and I had in my own mind become a writer.

The distance between the writer and his material grew with the two later books; the vision was wider. And then intuition led me to a large book about our family life. During this book my writing ambition grew. But when it was over I felt I had done all that I could do with my island material. No matter how much I meditated on it, no further fiction would come.

Accident, then, rescued me. I became a traveller. I travelled in the Caribbean region and understood much more about the colonial set-up of which I had been part. I went to India, my ancestral land, for a year; it was a journey that broke my life in two. The books that I wrote about these two journeys took me to new realms of emotion, gave me a world-view I had never had, extended me technically. I was able in the fiction that then came to me to take in England as well as the Caribbean – and how hard that was to do. I was able also to take in all the racial groups of the island, which I had never before been able to do.

This new fiction was about colonial shame and fantasy, a book, in fact, about how the powerless lie about themselves, and lie to themselves, since it is their only resource. The book was called *The Mimic Men*. And it was

not about mimics. It was about colonial men mimicking the condition of manhood, men who had grown to distrust everything about themselves. Some pages of this book were read to me the other day – I hadn't looked at it for more than thirty years – and it occurred to me that I had been writing about colonial schizophrenia. But I hadn't thought of it like that. I had never used abstract words to describe any writing purpose of mine. If I had, I would never have been able to do the book. The book was done intuitively, and only out of close observation.
I have done this little survey of the early part of my career to try to show the stages by which, in just ten years, my birthplace had altered or developed in my writing: from the comedy of street life to a study of a kind of widespread schizophrenia. What was simple had become complicated.

Both fiction and the travel-book form have given me my way of looking; and you will understand why for me all literary forms are equally valuable. It came to me, for instance, when I set out to write my third book about India – twenty-six years after the first – that what was most important about a travel book were the people the writer travelled among. The people had to define themselves. A simple enough idea, but it required a new kind of book; it called for a new way of travelling. And it was the very method I used later when I went, for the second time, into the Muslim world.

I have always moved by intuition alone. I have no system, literary or political. I have no guiding political idea. I think that probably lies with my ancestry. The Indian writer R K Narayan, who died this year, had no political idea. My father, who wrote his stories in a very dark time, and for no reward, had no political idea. Perhaps it is because we have been far from authority for many centuries. It gives us a special point of view. I feel we are more inclined to see the humour and pity of things.

Nearly thirty years ago I went to Argentina. It was at the time of the guerrilla crisis. People were waiting for the old dictator Perón to come back from exile. The country was full of hate. Peronists were waiting to settle old scores. One such man said to me, "There is good torture and bad torture." Good torture was what you did to the enemies of the people. Bad torture was what the enemies of the people did to you. People on the other side were saying the same thing. There was no true debate about anything. There was only passion and the borrowed political jargon of Europe. I wrote, "Where jargon turns living issues into abstractions, and where jargon ends by competing with jargon, people don't have causes. They only have enemies."

And the passions of Argentina are still working themselves out, still defeating reason and consuming lives. No resolution is in sight.

I am near the end of my work now. I am glad to have done what I have done, glad creatively to have pushed myself as far as I could go. Because of the intuitive way in which I have written, and also because of the baffling nature of my material, every book has come as a blessing. Every book has amazed me; up to the moment of writing I never knew it was there. But the greatest miracle for me was getting started. I feel – and the anxiety is still vivid to me – that I might easily have failed before I began.

I will end as I began, with one of the marvellous little essays of Proust in *Against Sainte-Beuve*. "The beautiful things we shall write if we have talent," Proust says, "are inside us, indistinct, like the memory of a melody which delights us though we are unable to recapture its outline. Those who are obsessed by this blurred memory of truths they have never known are the men who are gifted … Talent is like a sort of memory which will enable them finally to bring this indistinct music closer to them, to hear it clearly, to note it down …"

Talent, Proust says. I would say luck, and much labour.

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Banquet Speech

Sir V. S. Naipaul's speech at the Nobel Banquet, 10 December 2001.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Honoured Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the things that happen to people who get the Nobel Prize is that they get a lot of media attention. Many interviews. So many that I begin to feel now that I have lost the capacity for spontaneous thought. I need the questions. So, I thought I would begin this two-minute speech like the old-fashioned comedian. The man to whom things happen on the way to the studio.

Well, then. Something happened to me on the way to Stockholm. The strap of my wrist-watch broke. And for some surreal moments I found myself looking at my watch on the floor of the plane. This is no metaphor. Here is the strapless watch. What did it mean? What was the awful

symbolism? The fact that all through the Nobel week I was to be without my watch.

The great Caesar, landing in Egypt, fell flat on his face on the wet shore. You can imagine the consternation of his officers, until the great and resourceful man shouted, "Africa, I've got you!" Some centuries later, the Emperor Julian, training one morning with his soldiers, lost the wicker part of his shield. He was left holding only the grip or the handle. How terrible for everybody until the Emperor shouted, "What I have I hold".

Not having the resourcefulness of these great men, I could find no words to make the bad symbolism good. Until tonight, when I understood that time was to stop for me during this Nobel week, and that, when it began again, it would be truly new. Now my strapless watch, benign again, tells me without threat that my time is running out. My two minutes are up.

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The Nobel Banquet 2001

A Summary

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2001/banquet-video/

[13:20]

Watch a short video summary of the Nobel Banquet on 10 December 2001, starting at the Stockholm City Hall in Sweden, where the distinguished guests arrive and walk in a procession to the Blue Hall. Toasts are made to His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden and Alfred Nobel (5:18). The entertainment starts (7:14), and the meal ends with a traditional 'ice-cream parade' to serve guests their desserts in the candlelit hall (8:46). The after-dinner dancing takes place in the Golden Hall (12:41).

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Interview

Interview, December 2001

Interview with the 2001 Nobel Laureate in Literature, Sir V. S. Naipaul, by Horace Engdahl, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, 12 December 2001.

Sir Vidia talks about how he learnt to be a writer; how his writing developed (4:47); 'A House for Mr. Biswas' (6:20); 'The Loss of El Dorado' (10:41); his style of writing (17:43); 'The Enigma of Arrival' (21:42); 'A Bend in the River' (29:53); and about his name (32:37).

Interview Transcript

My name is Horace Engdahl, I am the Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, and I welcome here today in the studio Sir Vidiadhar Naipaul.
V. S. Naipaul: Thank you.

Nobel Laureate in Literature of the year 2001. Sir Vidia, if you try to think back to your beginnings as a writer, when you were a young man, and hadn't yet published anything, what was your idea of the kind of writer you wanted to begin with being? What kind of literature did you want to

produce? Into what tradition, if I may say so, did you wish to insert yourself in those days?

V. S. Naipaul: Actually it was, it couldn't be that kind of question that one had to answer. One's wish was to learn to write. You know, I could write school essays, I could do university writing, but to become a writer was another matter. The writing had to have another kind of internal life and spring and tension, so I had to learn. And the great, great problem for me, just beginning, was to find out what kind of person I was. Now, this is not pretentious. I began when I was about 17, much influenced by Evelyn Waugh, I began writing a farce, set in Trinidad, and I worked at that for two years. Now, nothing happened to that. I was heartbroken, but not disappointed. The value of that to me was that I learned how to take a book to the end. I learned distance in writing. But the farce was not suited to me.

Still, if I may interrupt you, in the short stories of *Miguel Street*, there seems to be farcical elements in your writing.

> I spent a long time working at something much more serious, much more sombre.

V. S. Naipaul: When I became secure, when I became secure, because after that farcical Evelyn Waugh-like book, I spent a long time working at something much more serious, much more sombre. And I sent that to … I was doing a BBC programme, editing it, once a week, and a literary person came to do something on the programme, and I asked him to look, look at what I was doing, and he replied very promptly, saying please abandon this. This was a serious book.

So, out of these two rejections the farce and then this very sombre later book, these two failures, I arrived one day in my mind quite miraculously at this other tone in *Miguel Street*, which you just mentioned. And I've thought about the origin of that, and I believe it has a base in Spanish picaresque writing. I believe it derives from Lazarillo de Tormes, one aspect, one aspect. That was a book I studied in the sixth form before going to Oxford, and when I was in Oxford, and out of this wish to be a writer, not knowing what to write about, one of the things I did was to translate the Lazarillo for my own benefit. I sent it to the editor of the Penguin Classics and, oh no, I asked him whether he'd like me to translate it and he didn't think it was a classic. So nothing happened to that, but it was with me for a long time, and I think the tone was still with me. I can still, as it were, give you the rhythm and the language of the Lazarillo. Well, first of all, you must know that my name is so-and-so, and I was the son of so-and-so, and I was born on the River Tormes, it came about in this way. So I know the rhythm of that kind of thing. Yes, so that's where it began really.

But gradually it seems to me you came to weed out the element of farcicality and comedy.
V. S. Naipaul: Yes. Yes. Yes.

And once you arrive at *A House for Mr Biswas* things are very different in your writing. Why was that?
V. S. Naipaul: It was a great … this early writing, which was full of jokes, and it … those jokes were a form of hysteria, and the hysteria had to do with my own uncertainty, in every way. Uncertainty about myself, uncertainty about my writing, my family life, the whole thing. And when people are so uncertain they can make a lot of jokes like that.

Protecting oneself.
V. S. Naipaul: Yes. It is the response, really, it's the way you deal with it. And when a bit of certainty came in, with the writing, then I found other aspects of my personality now, without striving for them, entering the writing, and it was in that book. You are quite right, that fourth book was where another personality emerged which had been dragged out by labour, by literary labour.

And this book made you famous, is that right?
V. S. Naipaul: Not immediately. I'll tell you what it did. It took a long time to get started as a piece of writing, and I think it took about seven or eight months to feel that it was a real book. And then it became grander and grander in my mind, and for the first time I felt I was a writer.

> … and for the first time I felt I was a writer.

I used to walk the streets feeling very confident and I told someone that if, at that stage, someone had said to me, now, I'll give you a million pounds, but on this condition, that you stop writing, I would have said no. It gave that confidence. So that was one of the great effects of it. It gave confidence in the handling of language. I told you I had to learn to write. Now, I haven't told you that it was a deliberate learning. I forgot everything I knew when I was beginning to learn to write, and I did this thing about writing one sentence after another, adding one bit of meaning to another bit of meaning. And probably it became stilted. In this fourth book, the one you mentioned, I could let the sentences become longer, I could let there be subordinate clauses. I was very much aware of that feeling, I was confident enough to do that.

And also it seems that you've won confidence in the form of the novel with that book, because it is a grand novel, on the scale of the Victorian novels that we know of the 19th century. I think of it personally as one of the very few examples in the 20th century of the truly successful novel, in the classical sense. Where did you learn the craft of the novel? Who were your models, if you had any?

V. S. Naipaul: I had none. The learning came with what I had done before. That prentice work, those first three books, *Miguel Street*, *The Masseur*, another comic book, that, and the beginning of Mr Biswas, that was where I learned it. I learned it by the writing.

And the fact that you arrived in Mr Biswas as a novel on the grand scale, it came naturally out of the material, you mean?

V. S. Naipaul: Yes, and it began in a rather stilted way. So I wasn't prepared for what happened. And again and again in my writing and in my literary life it comes with this idea of surprise, I'm taken by surprise. Things happen and I don't know why. My original idea for that book, the fourth book, which you say is very big and successful, was very schematic. I thought I would have a man dying. My father had died in 1952 so that would be an element in that. And he'd be surrounded by a few simple pieces of furniture. Again, this would echo something in our past. And I thought he would tell the story, or the writer would tell the story, of the various pieces of furniture. I think by the time I got to writing the book, the schematic thing was abandoned. But I needed that to feel I knew where I was going. But I learned it myself. And what I was doing in that book, the big fourth book, everything was visual. There was a picture in every paragraph, and every sentence as I wished, every sentence adds, adds, adds. So the book is very fast and very pictorial. It was because I had had to learn for myself, really.

Later on you wrote other novels, but gradually you came to move away from the novel in the classical sense. To me, this process begins already with *The Loss of El Dorado*, which is a book that resembles nothing else. I can think of very few parallels to that book. I mean, it's not a piece of history in the ordinary sense, it's not a novel, it's not a fantasy, it's documentary in a sense, but it has the atmosphere of a piece of fiction without being one. How did you find that form?

> I look for the people, I look for the stories …

V. S. Naipaul: Well, it came naturally because I was asked to do this book about a city, so I chose Port of Spain. And then I found that there were not the, the material was not available. So I had, living in London, to go to the sources. And of course I'm not an historian, not an academic historian. I look for the people,

I look for the stories, and I wrote it in my own way, so the labour was quite immense. To write a paragraph of narrative, seemingly simple narrative, I probably had consulted about 20 documents. So every little detail about the commissioner's wife, churning butter, thinking it was as good as Cambridge butter, little details, everything had been arrived at through the documents. And I was not interested in the other kind of history, only this human history. And I paid a bitter price for it.

In what sense?
V. S. Naipaul: No-one was interested in it. It's very hard to imagine now, but 69 years ago that kind of work about the New World, and this place in the New World, from which I had come, it was not considered a good way of writing history, and the area itself was not considered important. It's a singular way of looking at the world, but it existed in those days. I remember the man who wrote for The Times, he actually was a friend of mine, disliking the book, and saying I should have written a pamphlet. You know?

I'm glad you didn't, though.
V. S. Naipaul: I'm glad I didn't. So I paid a price, the American publisher who commissioned it didn't pay for it, so I had to look around for another publisher. So I got very little money for two years' hard labour. Anyway, there we are, that's the story of that. And again, it was a writer working in his own way, and not knowing he was doing anything original. It just seemed natural.

But you came to discover that you had landed upon a new way of writing, a new method in this book, because later when you reflect on, for instance, when you found the name Chaguanas in the archives you had become aware that there was something in fiction that didn't quite suit your needs, and that you had to develop a form that was more tied to factual details, and to the actual utterings of people that you had met. And let me recall another thing you said, just the other week, at the press conference when you arrived in Stockholm, and someone asked you your opinion of Stendhal, and it so happened that you had just re-read his two major novels, and become violently disappointed with them, having been an ardent admirer of Stendhal. This must mean that to you the novel, after all, is a form of some importance and that makes high demands on its writer, and perhaps even a very gifted man like Stendhal was not able to answer to that demand.
V. S. Naipaul: He couldn't do it, he couldn't do it. He had intelligence, he had a lot of social experience, he had the wish to be a writer, but there was something where the inspiration dried up very soon. And he couldn't take you along, possibly because actually he probably had lived too full a life. Probably had

found fulfilment in real life, whereas I think writers probably have to live more seriously in this other world, the world they create. I think it's possible.

The parallel you made then was with Flaubert who lived in his country house without any life at all. It's throughout long stretches of his life with only the rats for company, and some old ladies who sat with his mother on the ground floor. But where do you come in yourself in this, I mean, are you, do you feel yourself to be primarily a novelist? Personally, although I praised in my speech at the Concert House, your travel books and your non-fiction, I feel that maybe you are at heart a man of the imagination, because everything you write, even if it is based on factual details, seems to be, how shall I say, there is an all-pervasive vision that colours it and that melts it into something different, transforms experience into, well, literature. We don't have to call it novel but it is definitely literature.

… one is so much seeking to understand the world through their eyes.

V. S. Naipaul: Well, they are almost works of the imagination. Although shall we say with the travel books, bad word, the books of enquiry, you know, on certain movements, one is so much looking for people. One is so much looking, one is so much seeking to understand the world through their eyes, these people who are quite different from me, and I'm interested in them, the way I'm interested in all people, and I try to present the world through their eyes, so inevitably, as you've just said, it does become a work of the imagination. It's actually my writing imagination, observing and dealing with their experience.

Your style, that is a much discussed phenomenon. I even heard someone who had computed the average number of letters in a word in your texts and that should be four, I think, if I remember right. That may very well be correct. It's obvious that to any reader the style strikes one as transparent and very clear, I think Coetzee said in an article recently that it's cool and clean like a knife. And how do you arrive at that style? Is it something that comes naturally, or do you arrive at it by elimination, by crossing out words, removing unnecessary adjectives, and so on?

V. S. Naipaul: Well, it begins with what I said earlier about how I learned to write, when I try to get every sentence to say something. And I think that's become a habit. I no longer think I'm doing it but that is the habit of writing. So the writing moves very fast. And then I do have to get everything I want to say into the sentences. I must be careful not in my speed to leave things out.

I made a speech, a two-minute speech, at the banquet, the awards banquet. I give you my word, that was written three times, there were three drafts for it. One draft, then typed out, that corrected, then corrected yet again, so as to get it all. And one aspect was to get the spoken language, to get it, the quality of speech in it, and the other thing was to, as it were, to get, well, I was talking with a watch, my watchstrap was broken, and I wanted to make a little story about this for the dinner. And I wondered about the symbolism, and I'd talk about various people in the past who looked for portents, and then I said well, yes, because I was coming to the ceremony, that it was OK, that's what it meant, that time was going to stop and then time was going to become new. And so the watch then had become benign again. Now I had to, that came in about the third version, the watch was benign again. And it was telling me that my time was running out, and I had, I forgot to put in the first draft, it was telling me without threat that my time was running out. You know, that is, these are the little things I do. I hope, I'm sorry to give it in this little fine detail, but this is …

It's most useful, I think, for the listener.
V. S. Naipaul: This is how the writing is done. What I don't do, I don't rewrite whole areas to make it fit. I write as I go along. There must be that progressive discovery.

That puts me in mind of the quotation from Proust that you used in your Nobel Lecture, with this melody that exists somewhere in the head, and you had to get down all the notes. And sometimes you miss a few, and then you have to return to …
V. S. Naipaul: You have to return and get the other notes …

… get the additional notes until they are all there and you sing the melody like it was meant. Well, that makes sense, somehow.
V. S. Naipaul: But it's not done self consciously. It's not done for effect at all. It's done, in fact, not to be noticed.

Yes, and I mean when the melody's there nobody sings what went before.
V. S. Naipaul: Exactly.

I think that if you look at your writing as a whole, there are at least to me two books that tower over the landscape, one we have already mentioned, *A House for Mr Biswas*, the other one being *The Enigma of Arrival*, which to me is one of the true masterpieces of contemporary literature, and an amazingly difficult book to describe. One doesn't know quite what it is. Did that also just evolve?

V. S. Naipaul: It just came to me to write it like that. It just absolutely came to me to write it with this outer autobiographical crust, about the man being a writer, and how out of this wish to be a writer, and out of social ignorance, he is still looking only for what he's read, and when he comes to England, and missing the great stories around him in 1950, which England was full of, still, you know, the post-war refugees, the displaced persons they were called, I missed all of that, or the writer missed all of that, and was looking for what he had read in books, and at last the narrative, the outer narrative is he finds, he stumbles on his material, which is his own background, his past, the Empire, it gets ever bigger, and final irony, he comes to rest in the manner created by an Imperial fortune, which is now in decay. So the outer part was …

But this decay also, in a way, makes room for him.
V. S. Naipaul: It makes room for him, yes.

Which otherwise wouldn't have been there.
V. S. Naipaul: Exactly, exactly. And he's aware of that, and he's grateful for it. Yes, it makes room for him.

And to a certain extent identifies himself, I think …
V. S. Naipaul: With the decay.

And also with his aristocrat he sees across the lawn. At least, there is a sympathy.
V. S. Naipaul: Yes, there is a sympathy. But I suppose if the writer in that book had got to know the aristocrat, had got to understand his limitations, had got to understand the boastfulness …

It's like when Proust finally made his way into St Germain and discovered that the wonderful conversations that he had dreamed of didn't exist, they were talking nonsense. It was as superficial as you could ever imagine.
V. S. Naipaul: But if I, if the writer had met the landlord figure, then probably he couldn't have written that book. It's better for the landlord to be vague, in the background. And I was very much aware when I was writing that, the word 'landlord' comes from *Wuthering Heights*. *Wuthering Heights* is written in the first person, an unimportant person tells the story, and he just says I've just visited, or had a visit from, my landlord. And it was Mr Heathcliff, you know, who was the landlord. And that word, just used it there, but English, if you use the language, I'm afraid it's full of these little echoes and verbal borrowings and things like that.
Every literary language is a kind of a churchyard.

V. S. Naipaul: Absolutely.

Other writers buried beneath.
V. S. Naipaul: Yes, good way, good way of saying it, yes.

However, if you look at the title of that book, *The Enigma of Arrival*, it first puzzles the reader, but after a while you come to a chapter where the whole thing is explained, it goes back to a painting or, to be exact, a reproduction of a painting by de Chirico, and you make a sort of reading or interpretation of that painting and you tell a little story, and that is the enigma of arrival. Well, that story I personally find to be completely amazing. It so fascinated me when I read it, and also the fact that you make practically no use of that story in the book. It is just there, isolated. But still it radiates a sort of energy into everything else in that book. And I have to ask you, how you came to this fantasy, because it isn't really in the picture. This is something that you have found.

> … my thoughts go back to the classical world. It's always interested me …

V. S. Naipaul: Ah well, I suppose it, in the de Chirico painting there is a sail, and the people, it is a quayside, if we can describe it, it's very hard to describe it, nothing is strictly real. It's a quayside and there's half of a mast of an old fashioned sailing vessel, probably an old fashioned galley, and the figures look classical, so my thoughts go back to the classical world. It's always interested me, the way the ships stayed close to the coast.

You think of Ostia, or something like that.
V. S. Naipaul: Something like that, yes. And then I thought of all the food and how it would have travelled, so it came like that, it came like that. And probably there might have been some element of a dream …

Yes, that's what I was going to suggest.
V. S. Naipaul: … there would have been a …

There is a dreamlike quality to the tail. This way of losing one's self. You have a goal in a dream but you never reach it, you know, you're always diverted. Endlessly.
V. S. Naipaul: In that little story you liked, the man gets off the ship, he comes to the strange classical world, he has adventures and then he's got to run away again because they become nasty adventures. And he …

Yes, that's interesting. And how do they get nasty? Well, he becomes involved in some sort of religious procession, or ceremony, and suddenly you realise that he is going to be the victim. And that's interesting because I think here we strike at a deep almost anthropological fantasy that has a real content, what one anthropologist has described as the original system of our culture, human sacrifice, which kept the community together by directing the evil energies to one particular person that was thrown out of the community and became a victim, was emulated and later sanctified, and transferred to God. I mean, you find this mechanism in all religions if you go far back. And I think there is a remnant of this in everybody's psychology, especially people who, like writers, become a bit isolated in society, and are faced with groups into which they are never quite integrated.

V. S. Naipaul: I think you're probably right.

They always fear that they're going to turn into lynch mobs so it's a potential in every group and congregation you meet, that they will discover the victim in you. That's, I mean, I'm not taking this out of your writing because that's a personal feeling that I have myself, and I was very touched by that when I read it, when I came to this detail in your dream, or your interpretation of it. But that's the way it has to end, suddenly you realise that this place that seems so full of promise is actually a place where people are going to sacrifice you. And you have to get away.

V. S. Naipaul: But when he gets back to the quay, there is no sail. There is no ship. And it's rather frightening.

Yes, it's very frightening, because it means that his life is over.

V. S. Naipaul: Yes. And you, just this second, what I say is really quite true, things occur to be only when things are talked about. There is an echo of that in a book I wrote about Africa, four years later, *A Bend in the River*. It occurs right at the end, when the African boy, who is serving a dictator like Mobutu has cooked up a plan to kill Mobutu, has that dream, he says I have a dream, and how are we going to go, are we going to go in one car, or are we going to go in two cars? So, with the man who is going to be killed, would he be with the rest of us? Would we be able to talk with him, or … so it occurs again. It's the same story. It's the same story, and …

And it's equally frightening.

V. S. Naipaul: … it's equally frightening. Equally frightening. Yes, equally frightening.

And this, I think, is the basic element of epics, you know, that this possibility always exists. That you can always be the victim, unsuspecting,

and you suddenly find yourself confronted with this, this mob that is going to destroy you.
V. S. Naipaul: Well, you know, that it's your analysis and you know, I actually accept it.

I think it's just a situation of literature, in a sense, too, and I mean, we've seen tragic examples of that over the last decades in various parts of the world. And whenever someone raises the voice against literature, like they have sometimes done when criticising your book, I always hear this murmur of the mob.
V. S. Naipaul: The mob. The academic mob.

Yes, it can be an academic mob, or it can be just a ...
V. S. Naipaul: Yes.

... a vulgar mob. But it's there, somewhere. That's the frightening aspect of ...
V. S. Naipaul: But fortunately I have worked in a free society, fortunately. And I have been able to ignore those murmurs and get on with my work. I could easily imagine, though, not being in a free society and really being, as it were, silenced. That's unbearable. But there we are, there we are.

Well, one aspect of being a writer, I suppose, is that other people gain control of your myth. But this, in a way, recalls the fact that everyone has to live with that. You have a name, but the name is nothing having lent it, other people have called you by that name, and you don't pronounce your name, other people do. You know, myself, a couple of years ago, I realised that I was no longer sure how my first name should be pronounced. It's an English name, it comes from my grandmother, and my father used it with an English pronunciation, just like you do. But living in Sweden all my life, the pronunciation's gradually been corrupted, and now people in the literary world usually say it in quite a different way, and there are three or four pronunciations of it, and when asked myself which is the correct one, I have no answer. Because I never use the name myself. Then I happened to come upon a passage in the letters that you published the other year, between father and son, which is the letters between yourself and your family, and there in a letter to Kamla, it's your sister I understand, from 1952, you say like this. Let me quote: 'Everybody calls me Vidiadhar. Disgusting name, and even I have got into the habit of calling myself that way.' How do you feel today?
V. S. Naipaul: Well, I was attracted to the long name. Vidiadhar. It is a Sanskrit compound word and it's very simple. The word vidia has the same root as the

word video, to see, from which we get everything, video, vision, everything, vista. So it means the bearer of wisdom. And I cherished it, you see, it was given to me, by my father, and at one time it was my only possession. It was my name as a child, so when it was shortened, I really felt I had debased it a little bit, yes. That was probably what was meant there. But now I have to live with that.

I suppose you have.
V. S. Naipaul: There's a little question for me. There's some talk of having a library with my name, and I am wondering what name I should give it. And I would very much like the full name, rather than this easy abbreviation. But I've thought about it like that. The name was important to me, and you know, one doesn't wish to talk too much about things like this in this way, but there was a man I met, in India, who was a fan of my work, and to my great surprise he came to see me last year, an elderly man, of course, and then he turned up in Chicago to a reading I was giving and brought his daughter. He'd given his grandson my name, so this sort of magic was going on. He gave it as a kind of magic. So, it's magical, magical.

But your comfort must be that whatever people will call you, your books will always retain your full name. That's how it's going to be preserved.
V. S. Naipaul: It will be preserved like that, yes, good.

Thank you.
V. S. Naipaul: Thank you.

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Prose

Excerpt from

The Enigma of Arrival

(Chapter: Jack's Garden, page: 52-53)

To see the possibility, the certainty, of ruin, even at the moment of creation: it was my temperament. Those nerves had been given me as a child in Trinidad partly by our family circumstances: the half-ruined or broken-down houses we lived in, our many moves, our general uncertainty. Possibly, too, this mode of feeling went deeper, and was an ancestral inheritance,

something that came with the history that had made me: not only India, with its ideas of a world outside men's control, but also the colonial plantations or estates of Trinidad, to which my impoverished Indian ancestors had been transported in the last century – estates of which this Wiltshire estate, where I now lived, had been the apotheosis.

Fifty years ago, there would have been no room for me on the estate; even now my presence was a little unlikely. But more than accident had brought me here. Or rather, in the series of accidents that had brought me to the manor cottage, with a view of the restored church, there was a clear historical line. The migration, within the British Empire, from India to Trinidad had given me the English language as my own, and a particular kind of education. This had partly seeded my wish to be a writer in a particular mode, and had committed me to the literary career I had been following in England for twenty years.

The history I carried with me, together with the self-awareness that had come with my education and ambition, had sent me into the world with a sense of glory dead; and in England had given me the rawest stranger's nerves. Now ironically – or aptly – living in the grounds of this shrunken estate, going out for my walks, those nerves were soothed, and in the wild garden and orchard beside the water meadows I found a physical beauty perfectly suited to my temperament and answering, besides, every good idea I could have had, as a child in Trinidad, of the physical aspect of England.

The estate had been enormous, I was told. It had been created in part by the wealth of empire. But then bit by bit it had been alienated. The family in its many branches flourished in other places. Here in the valley, there now lived only my landlord, elderly, a bachelor, with people to look after him. Certain physical disabilities had now been added to the malaise which had befallen him years before, a malaise of which I had no precise knowledge, but interpreted as something like accidia, the monk's torpor or disease of the Middle Ages – which was how his great security, his excessive worldly blessings, had taken him. The accidia had turned him into a recluse, accessible only to his

intimate friends. So that on the manor itself, as on my walks on the down, I had a kind of solitude.

I felt a great sympathy for my landlord. I felt I could understand his malaise; I saw it as the other side of my own. I did not think of my landlord as a failure. Words like failure and success didn't apply. Only a grand man or a man with a grand idea of his human worth could ignore the high money value of his estate and be content to live in its semi-ruin. My meditations in the manor were not of imperial decline. Rather, I wondered at the historical chain that had brought us together – he in his house, I in his cottage, the wild garden his taste (as I was told) and also mine.

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Bio-bibliography

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

Biobibliographical Notes

The British writer, born in Trinidad, **V(idiadhar) S(urajprasad) Naipaul** was born in 1932 in Chaguanas, close to the Port of Spain on Trinidad, in a family descended from immigrants from the north of India. His grandfather worked in a sugar cane plantation and his father was a journalist and writer. At the age of 18 Naipaul travelled to England where, after studying at University College at Oxford, he was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1953. From then on he continued to live in England (since the 70s in Wiltshire, close to Stonehenge) but he has also spent a great deal of time travelling in Asia, Africa and America. Apart from a few years in the middle of the 1950s, when he was employed by the BBC as a free-lance journalist, he has devoted himself entirely to his writing.

Naipaul's works consist mainly of novels and short stories, but also include some that are documentary. He is to a very high degree a cosmopolitan writer, a fact that he himself considers to stem from his lack of roots: he is unhappy about the cultural and

spiritual poverty of Trinidad, he feels alienated from India, and in England he is incapable of relating to and identifying with the traditional values of what was once a colonial power.

The events in his earliest books take place in the West Indies. A few years after the publication of his first work, *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), came what is considered by many to be one of his most outstanding novels, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), in which the protagonist is modelled on the author's father.

After the enormous success of *A House for Mr. Biswas,* Naipaul extended the geographical and social perspective of his writing to describe with increasing pessimism the deleterious impact of colonialism and emerging nationalism on the third world, in for instance *Guerrillas* (1975) and *A Bend in the River* (1979), the latter a portrayal of Africa that has been compared to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.*

In his travel books and his documentary works he presents his impressions of the country of his ancestors, India, as in *India : a Million Mutinies Now* (1990), and also critical assessments of Muslim fundamentalism in non-Arab countries such as Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia and Pakistan in *Among the Believers* (1981) and *Beyond Belief* (1998).

The novels *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *A Way in the World* (1994) are to a great extent autobiographical. In *The Enigma of Arrival* he describes how a landed estate in southern England and its proprietor, with a colonial background and afflicted by a degenerative disease, gradually decline before finally perishing. *A Way in the World,* which is a cross between fiction, memoirs and history, consists of nine independent but thematically linked narratives in which Caribbean and Indian traditions are blended with the culture encountered by the author when he moved to England at the age of 18.

V.S. Naipaul has been awarded a number of literary prizes, among them the Booker Prize in 1971 and the T.S. Eliot Award for Creative Writing in 1986. He is an honorary doctor of St. Andrew's College and Columbia University and of the Universities of Cambridge, London and Oxford. In 1990 he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth.

A selection of works by V.S. Naipaul

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Press Release

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

The Permanent Secretary
Press release
11 October 2001

The Nobel Prize in Literature 2001
VS Naipaul

The Nobel Prize in Literature for 2001 is awarded to the British writer, born in Trinidad, V. S. Naipaul

"for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories".

V. S. Naipaul is a literary circumnavigator, only ever really at home in himself, in his inimitable voice. Singularly unaffected by literary fashion and models he has wrought existing genres into a style of his own, in which the customary distinctions between fiction and non-fiction are of subordinate importance.

Naipaul's literary domain has extended far beyond the West Indian island of Trinidad, his first subject, and now encompasses India, Africa, America from south to north, the Islamic countries of Asia and, not least, England. Naipaul is Conrad's heir as the annalist of the destinies of empires in the moral sense: what they do to human beings. His authority as a narrator is grounded in his memory of what others have forgotten, the history of the vanquished.

The farcical yarns in his first work, *The Mystic Masseur,* and the short stories in *Miguel Street* with their blend of Chekhov and calypso established Naipaul as a humorist and a portrayer of street life. He took a giant stride with *A House for Mr.*

Biswas, one of those singular novels that seem to constitute their own complete universes, in this case a miniature India on the periphery of the British Empire, the scene of his father's circumscribed existence. In allowing peripheral figures their place in the momentousness of great literature, Naipaul reverses normal perspectives and denies readers at the centre their protective detachment. This principle was made to serve in a series of novels in which, despite the increasingly documentary tone, the characters did not therefore become less colourful. Fictional narratives, autobiography and documentaries have merged in Naipaul's writing without it always being possible to say which element dominates.

In his masterpiece *The Enigma of Arrival* Naipaul visits the reality of England like an anthropologist studying some hitherto unexplored native tribe deep in the jungle. With apparently short-sighted and random observations he creates an unrelenting image of the placid collapse of the old colonial ruling culture and the demise of European neighbourhoods.

Naipaul has drawn attention to the novel's lack of universality as a form, that it presupposes an inviolate human world of the kind that has been shattered for conquered peoples. He began to experience the inadequacy of fiction while he was working on *The Loss of El Dorado,* in which after extensive study of the archives he described the appalling colonial history of Trinidad. He found that he had to cling to the authenticity of the details and the voices and abstain from mere fictionalisation while at the same time continuing to render his material in the form of literature. His travel books allow witnesses to testify at every turn, not least in his powerful description of the eastern regions of the Islamic world, *Beyond Belief.* The author's empathy finds expression in the acuity of his ear.

Naipaul is a modern *philosophe,* carrying on the tradition that started originally with *Lettres persanes* and *Candide.* In a vigilant style, which has been deservedly admired, he transforms rage into precision and allows events to speak with their own inherent irony.

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Major Awards and Honors

- **Nobel Prize in Literature (2001):** Awarded "for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories".
- **Trinity Cross (1990):** Trinidad and Tobago's highest national honor.
- **Knighthood (1990):** Received a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II.
- **Booker Prize (1971):** Won for his novel *In a Free State*.
- **Jerusalem Prize (1983):** Awarded for his work on the freedom of the individual in society.
- **Somerset Maugham Award (1961):** Won for *Miguel Street*.
- **John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize (1958):** Awarded for *The Mystic Masseur*.
- **Hawthornden Prize (1964):** Won for *Mr. Stone and the Knight's Companion*.

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Caribbean Literature

{https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caribbean_literature}

Caribbean literature is the literature of the various territories of the Caribbean region. Literature in English from the former British West Indies may be referred to as **Anglo-Caribbean** or, in historical contexts, as **West Indian literature**. Most of these territories have become independent nations since the 1960s, though some retain colonial ties to the United Kingdom. They share, apart from the English language, a number of political, cultural, and social ties which make it useful to consider their literary output in a single category. Note that other non-independent islands may include the Caribbean unincorporated territories of the United States, however literature from this region has not yet been studied as a separate category and is independent from West Indian literature. The more wide-ranging term "Caribbean literature" generally refers to the literature of all Caribbean territories regardless of language—whether written in English, Spanish, French, Hindustani, or Dutch, or one of numerous creoles

The literature of Caribbean is exceptional, both in language and subject. Through themes of innocence, exile and return to motherland, resistance and endurance, engagement and alienation, self determination, Caribbean literature provides a powerful platform for Post-Colonial studies and to Caribbean literatures in importance the context of all literature.

"Caribbean literature" vs. "West Indian literature"

As scholarship expands, there is debate about the correct term to use for literature that comes from the region. Both terms are often used interchangeably despite having different origins and referring to slightly different groups of people. Since so much of Caribbean identity is linked to "insidious racism" and "the justification of slave labor", it is usual to refer to the author of the piece for their identity preference.

West Indian is defined as coming from the "West Indies", which includes "the islands of the Caribbean" and was "used first [for] indigenous population, and subsequently both [for] settlers of European origin and of people of African origin brought to the area as slaves." West Indian can also refer to things that can be "traced back" to the West Indies but the creators "live elsewhere". West Indian "was a term coined by colonising European powers." Caribbean, on the other hand, is defined as "of the Caribbean...its people, and their cultures" only.

Further issues include language classifications like Creole Caribbean literature and Anglophone Caribbean literature. Different languages also make different references to the texts. While there is no terminology that is obsolete, the issue requires acknowledgement, since it is the literature of historically oppressed people. The Spanish Caribbean islands include Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Panama as well as the islands of Venezuela and the Caribbean coast of Colombia.

Territories included in the category West Indian

The literature of Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Curaçao, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Martin, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos and the U.S. Virgin Islands would normally be considered to belong to the wider category of West Indian literature.

Development of the concept of West Indian literature

The term "West Indies" first began to achieve wide currency in the 1950s, when writers such as Samuel Selvon, John Hearne, Edgar Mittelholzer, V. S. Naipaul, Andrew Salkey, and George Lamming began to be published in the United Kingdom. A sense of a single literature developing across the islands was also encouraged in the 1940s by the BBC radio programme *Caribbean Voices*, which featured stories and poems written by West Indian authors, recorded in London under the direction of founding producer Una Marson and later Henry Swanzy, and broadcast back to the islands. Magazines such as *Kyk-Over-Al* in Guyana, *Bim* in Barbados, and *Focus* in Jamaica, which published work by writers from across the region, also encouraged links and helped build an audience.

Many—perhaps most—West Indian writers have found it necessary to leave their home territories and base themselves in the United Kingdom, the United States, or Canada in order to make a living from their work—in some cases spending

the greater parts of their careers away from the territories of their birth. Critics in their adopted territories might argue that, for instance, V. S. Naipaul ought to be considered a British writer instead of a Trinidadian writer, or Jamaica Kincaid and Paule Marshall American writers, but most West Indian readers and critics still consider these writers "West Indian".

West Indian literature ranges over subjects and themes as wide as those of any other "national" literature, but in general many West Indian writers share a special concern with questions of identity, ethnicity, and language that rise out of the Caribbean historical experience.

Marlon James at the 2010 Brooklyn Book Festival

One unique and pervasive characteristic of Caribbean literature is the use of "dialect" forms of the national language, often termed creole. The various local variations in the language adopted from the colonial powers such as Britain, Spain, Portugal, France and the Netherlands, have been modified over the years within each country and each has developed a blend that is unique to their country. Many Caribbean authors in their writing switch liberally between the local variation—now commonly termed nation language—and the standard form of the language.[10] Two West Indian writers have won the Nobel Prize for literature: Derek Walcott (1992), born in St. Lucia, resident mostly in Trinidad during the 1960s and '70s, and partly in the United States since then; and V. S. Naipaul (2001), born in Trinidad and resident in the United Kingdom since 1950. (Saint-John Perse, who won the Nobel Prize in 1960, was born in the French territory of Guadeloupe.)

Other notable names in (anglophone) Caribbean literature have included Una Marson, Earl Lovelace, Austin Clarke, Claude McKay, Louise Bennett, Orlando Patterson, Andrew Salkey, Edward Kamau Brathwaite (who was born in Barbados and has lived in Ghana and Jamaica), Linton Kwesi Johnson, Velma Pollard and Michelle Cliff, to name only a few. In more recent times, a number of literary voices have emerged from the Caribbean as well as the Caribbean diaspora, including Kittitian Caryl Phillips (who has lived in the UK since one month of age); Edwidge Danticat, a Haitian immigrant to the United States; Anthony Kellman from Barbados, who divides his time between Barbados and the United States; Andrea Levy of the United Kingdom;

Jamaicans Alecia McKenzie, who has lived in Belgium, Singapore and France, and Colin Channer and Marlon James, the author of the 2015 Man Booker Prize-winning novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (as well as *John Crow's Devil*, *The Book of Night Women*, the unpublished screenplay "Dead Men", and the short story "Under Cover of Darkness"), Antiguan Marie-Elena John, and Lasana M. Sekou from Saint Martin.

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The Impossible Legacy of VS Naipaul

https://slate.com/culture/2018/08/v-s-naipaul-dies-at-age-85-the-legacy-of-the-trinidadian-nobel-prize-winner.html

Many of his books are masterpieces. When I interviewed him, I couldn't keep the look of disgust off my face.

BY ISAAC CHOTINER
Aug 12, 20187:15 PM

V.S. Naipaul at home in England in 2001, the year he won the Nobel Prize for Literature

V.S. Naipaul, the Nobel Prize–winning author who explored issues of colonialism, race, and identity in a strikingly brilliant series of novels, essays, and travel books, died this weekend at the age of 85. As much as any single great writer of the 20th century, Naipaul is present in everything he wrote. His life story; his caustic, penetrating, often callous opinions; his cruelty; his genius: All are there, in his novels and nonfiction. Naipaul inflicted extreme psychological abuse on his first wife, Patricia Hale; beat his mistress; and seemed defiantly proud of his racism, misogyny, and toxic political views; to talk about separating the art from the man seems especially futile in his case. Indeed, the best way to consider the depth of his literary achievement is to view his writing as the partial result of his anger and abiding sense of humiliation, which allowed him to explore the human condition and the legacy of imperialism with a tireless and unflinching gaze, or what one critic called "a terrifying honesty."

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born in Trinidad in 1932; his grandparents had arrived a half-century earlier from India as indentured laborers. He was able to leave for England in the early 1950s, a move he quite clearly considered an escape. Once he graduated from Oxford, he settled down with Hale, who would become a crucial reader of his work, a tireless supporter of his travels, and a poignant victim of his moods and his viciousness. ("It could be said that I had killed her," he told his biographer, Patrick French, after treating her with extreme disregard while she battled cancer decades later. "It could be said. I feel a little bit that way.")

By the late 1950s, he had produced short stories and a novel set in Trinidad; from that point forward, he began five decades of fiction writing and travel, especially to India, Africa, and the Caribbean. He eventually married Nadira Alvi, a Pakistani journalist he met before Hale's death; he invited her to live in the home he had shared with Hale on the day after her cremation, in February of 1996.

Naipaul came under serious criticism from writers such as the St. Lucian Derek Walcott for depicting places like Trinidad as "half-made societies that seemed doomed to remain half-made." (That is from a reflection Naipaul wrote on Joseph Conrad, with whom he is often compared.) But Trinidad, and his background, would nevertheless exert a magnetic pull on the rest of his career. He would constantly return to the story of his journey to England, which made him part of the so-called Windrush generation of immigrants to Great Britain from the Caribbean, no matter how much Naipaul considered himself unique in supposedly transcending the circumstances of his birth. (His younger brother, Shiva, would make a similar journey years later and also became a successful novelist before dying at a young age.) Naipaul's views were often simplistically described as imperialist; in fact, he could trenchantly depict the psychological damage colonialism inflicted, but these insights did not lessen his bigotry, or his oft-stated contempt for the "mimicry" adopted by colonialism's victims.

By the time I interviewed Naipaul, in 2012, he was staying primarily in London, barely writing, and moving very slowly under Nadira Naipaul's watchful eye. He seemed to fully have embraced his increasingly common popular image as a grumpy reactionary, skeptical of all manner of social change and pessimistic about the fate of postcolonial societies around the world. He was intimidating and austere, and after a testy interview in which he seemed to get annoyed with most of my questions, and refused to talk about French's recent controversial biography, we sat down to lunch. (His reluctance was due largely, one assumes, to its revelations about Hale, whose diaries Naipaul had allowed French to use, in what French himself wrote was "an act of narcissism and humility.")

Naipaul finally opened up when discussing the death of his cat, Augustus, informing me that he no longer wanted to stay in the Wiltshire house Augustus had lived in because it made him too sad. "The terrible part of it is that people suggest to me that I get a new cat, that I invite this new cat into the home I shared with Augustus," he continued. "As if this one should just be replaced so soon. It shows a lack of understanding."

I asked Nadira some basic questions about her time as a journalist in Pakistan, and after answering several of them she smiled and asked if I knew what Pakistan needed. I informed her that I did not. "A dictator," she replied. At this her husband laughed.

"I think they have tried that," I said, doing my best to stay stoic.

"No, no, a very brutal dictator," she answered. I told her they had tried that, too. "No, no," she answered again. Only when a real dictator came in and killed the religious people in the country, and enough of them that the streets would "run with blood," could Pakistan be reborn. It was as if she was parodying a gross caricature of Naipaul's worst views—and also misunderstanding his pessimism about the ability of colonial societies to reinvent themselves, even through violence—but he smiled with delight as she spoke.

"That's so American of you," she then blurted out, before I had said anything. My face, while she had been talking, must have taken on a look of shock or disgust. "You tell a nice young American boy like yourself that a country needs a brutal dictator and they get a moralistic or concerned look on their face, as if every country is ready for a democracy. They aren't." The man who liked to say that Indian women wore a dot on their foreheads because they wanted to signal "my head is empty," and who stated that the destruction of a famous Indian mosque by Hindu fanatics was "India striving to regain her soul" had found his soulmate. I was also uncomfortably reminded of what the leftist Trinidadian writer C.L.R. James—part of whose life is captured to tantalizing effect in Naipaul's *A Way of the World*—said of Naipaul: that much of what he wrote was "what the whites want to say but dare not." It felt as if the clouds that had always obscured so much of what I loved about Naipaul were beginning to conceal everything.

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Videos

01] Dr Bhoendradatt Tewarie interviews Sir VS Naipaul
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBhZ4jmPAbY [42:24]
02] Great Books: "A House for Mr. Biswas" by V.S Naipaul
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCPK_od3H0k [43:01]
Farrell Jenab Hoy discusses "A House for Mr. Biswas" by V.S Naipaul. The Great Books Mini-Lecture Series is designed to introduce you to watershed texts that have changed their readers' views of the world. It's a series of short talks on great books.
03] V.S. Naipaul - The Masque of Africa: Glimpses of African Belief
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_VVM5mLW90 [56:30]

04] THE WRITER AND THE WORLD: VS NAIPAUL

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrF3PrxBQgI **[51:28]**

One of the greatest living writers, Nobel Prize-winning VS Naipaul, in conversation with DLF director Ahsan Akbar about his literary work Fifty five years ago, A House for Mr Biswas placed Sir Vidia as one of the youngest fellows of the Royal Society of Literature. Described by TIME magazine as 'a master of the modern novel,' he produced literary masterpieces such as In a Free State, Guerrillas, An Area of Darkness, The Mimic Men, The Enigma of Arrival, A Bend in the River, Among the Believers and many other modern classics in both fiction and nonfiction. This is Sir Vidia's first ever trip to Bangladesh and he comes as a guest of honour of Dhaka Lit Fest.

05] Living Writers - V. S. Naipaul

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JKGYlZDIV0 **[52:07]**

06] Sir VS Naipaul at THiNK 2011

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPjxZX8qMAM **[40:58]**

Nobel Laureate Sir VS Naipaul in conversation with Tarun J Tejpal at Tehelka-Newsweek's THiNK 2011 on a panel titled "What Writing Can Do That Nothing Else Can" THiNK 2011 is an incredible festival of ideas hosted by TEHELKA in collaboration with Newsweek (USA) - held in Goa, India from November 4-6, THiNK brought together the brightest minds in the worlds of technology, the arts and literature, medicine, economics, human rights, politics, business and more from the US, UK, India, Afghanistan, Israel, China and Pakistan to share ideas and inspiration.

07] V. S. Naipaul: The Masque of Africa | 92Y Readings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qV227nEyoQ0 **[1:15:32]**

V. S. Naipaul was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001. His new book is The Masque of Africa. "My theme is belief, not politics or economical life," writes Mr. Naipaul. "And yet at the bottom of the continent the political realities are so overwhelming that they have to be taken into account." He is the author of more than 20 books, including A House for Mr. Biswas, A Bend in the River and The Writer and the World. Mr. Naipaul is introduced and then interviewed by George Andreou, his longtime editor. Recorded October 18, 2010 at 92nd Street Y.

08] #JLF 2015: The Writer and the World

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW9D5pxCSwg **[1:00:23]**

09] V.S. Naipaul, Letters between a father and son,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGAuIW3xjBs **[1:06:04]**

10] V.S. Naipaul, Nobel Prize Laurate: His Life and Literature (Aug 17, 1932 – Aug 11, 1985)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOMb_gF98E0 **[2:08:18]**

11] V. S. Naipaul interview with Mel Gussow

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVpgFoy0sOQ [1:32:54]

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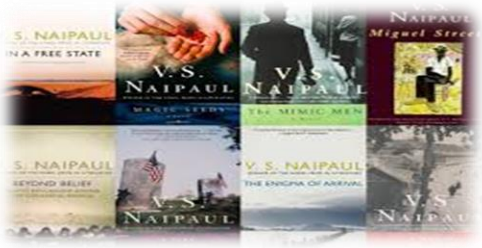
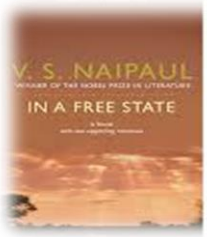

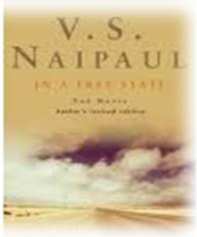

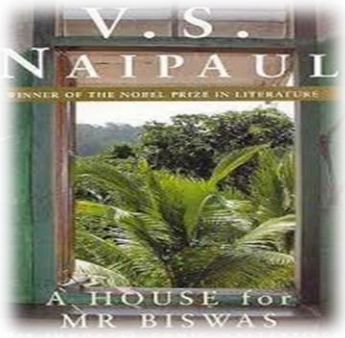
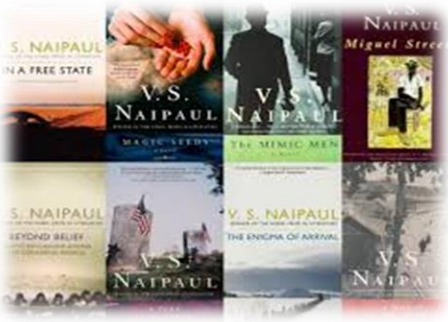
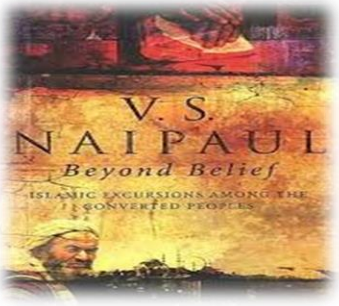

9 Feb 1940

Age 85 years

John M Coetzee

Nobel Prize in Literature 2003

Born: 9 February 1940, Cape Town, South Africa
Residence at the time of the award: South Africa

Prize motivation:

"who in innumerable guises
portrays the surprising
involvement of the outsider"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2003/coetzee/facts/}

Links to Other Sites

[01]On John Maxwell Coetzee from BBC News, with a short interview and an audio extract from the book "Disgrace"
[02] On J. M. Coetzee from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[03] An interview with J.M. Coetzee from Dagens Nyheter

Prize Announcement

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2003/prize-announcement/

[2:13]

Announcement of the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature to J. M. Coetzee, presented by the Permanent Secretary, Horace Engdahl, at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm, 2 October 2003.

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Nobel Diploma

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2003/prize-announcement/

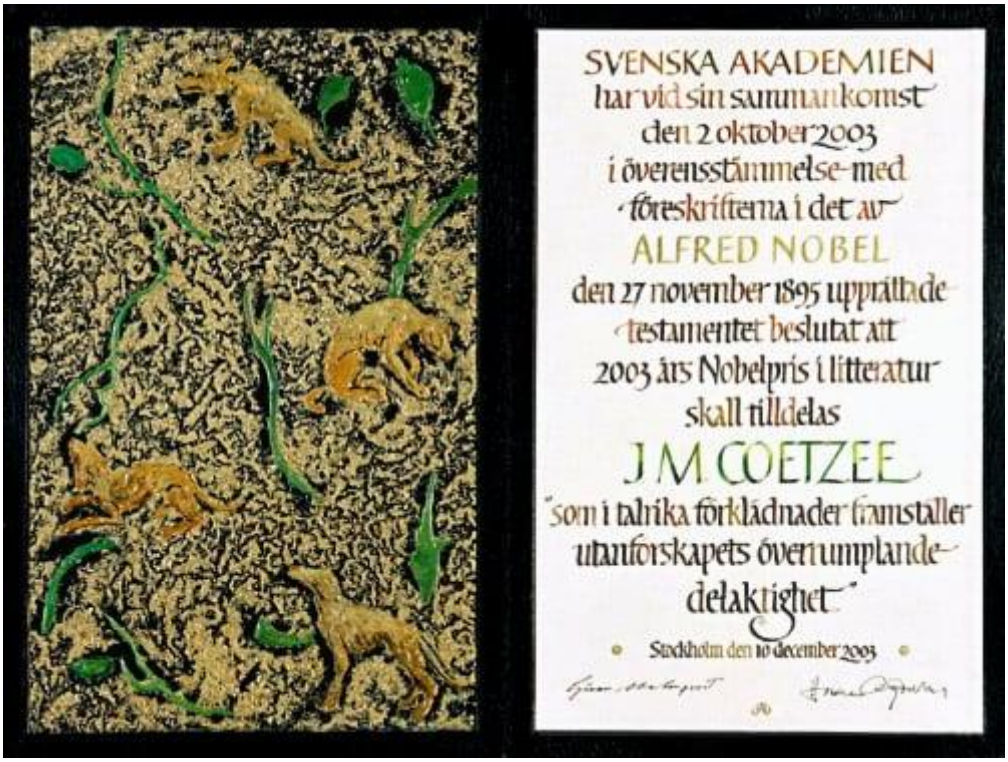

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Photo Gallery

Kindly visit the Web Page to view all 5 Photos

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2003/coetzee/photo-gallery/

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Prize Presentation

Kindly visit the Web Page

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2003/coetzee/prize-presentation/

Watch a video clip of the 2003 Nobel Laureate in Literature, J. M. Coetzee, receiving his Nobel Prize medal and diploma during the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony at the Concert Hall in Stockholm, Sweden, on 10 December 2003.

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Per Wästberg of the Swedish Academy, December 10, 2003.
Translation of the Swedish text.

Writer Per Wästberg delivering the Presentation Speech for the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature at the Stockholm Concert Hall.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Esteemed Nobel Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

To write is to awaken counter-voices within oneself, and to dare enter into dialogue with them. The dangerous attraction of the inner self is John Coetzee's theme: the senses and bodies of people, the interiority of Africa. "To imagine the unimaginable" is the writer's duty. As a post-modern allegorist, Coetzee knows that novels that do not seek to mimic reality best convince us that reality exists.

Coetzee sees through the obscene poses and false pomp of history, lending voice to the silenced and the despised. Restrained but stubborn, he defends the ethical value of poetry, literature and imagination. Without them, we blinker ourselves and become bureaucrats of the soul.

John Coetzee's characters seek refuge beyond the zones of power. *Life and Times of Michael K.* gives form to the dream of an individual outside the fabric of human coexistence. Michael K. is a virgin being, viewing the world from an infinite remove. Although exposed to the violence of racist tyranny, he achieves through passivity a freedom that confounds both the apartheid regime and the guerrilla forces simply because he wants nothing: neither war nor revolution, neither power nor money.

Waiting for the Barbarians is a disturbing love story about wanting to possess another person and to turn that person inside out as though she were a riddle to be solved. Everyone who has recognised the threat of totalitarianism and felt the desire to own another person can learn from Coetzee's dark fables. With intense concreteness and verbally disciplined desperation, he tackles one of the great problems of the ages: understanding the driving forces of brutality, torture and injustice.

Who does the writing, who seizes power by taking pen in hand? Can black experience be depicted by a white person? In *Foe*, Friday is an African, already dehumanised by Defoe. To give speech to Friday would be to colonise him and deny him what remains of his integrity. The girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* speaks an unintelligible language and has been blinded by torture; Michael K has a harelip and Friday has had his tongue cut out. His life is recounted by Susan Barton: that is, through 'white writing', the title of one of Coetzee's books.

However hard we attempt to grasp Michael and Friday, they have been made, by Coetzee, unsullied by interpretation. They remain silent. But between the lines, in what is unspoken, there is a distillation of feelings uncommon in contemporary literature.

The myth of the survivor on a desert island is the only story there is, Coetzee once said. Several of his books treat similar solitudes. Is it possible to stand outside history? Does freedom from the diktat of authority exist? "I don't like accomplices. God, let me be alone," says Jacobus Coetzee in the first novel, *Dusklands*, rejoicing in being abandoned. But he remains the tool of history, and what compels the natives to take him seriously is his victorious violence. He does, however, ask himself whether the blacks populate a wonderful world closed to his own senses: "Perhaps I have killed something of inestimable value."

Coetzee's work runs like a high-tension cable across an inhospitable South African landscape. Mrs. Curran in A*ge of Iron* has witnessed monstrous actions but is unable to condemn them using the words of others. Neither will Coetzee himself sign petitions or join in political rallies.

In the dystopian novel *Disgrace*, David Lurie does not achieve creativity and freedom until, stripped of all dignity, he is afflicted by his own shame and history's disgrace. In this work, Coetzee summarises his themes: race and gender, ownership and violence, and the moral and political complicity of everyone in that borderland where the languages of liberation and reconciliation carry no meaning.

Every new book by Coetzee is astonishingly unlike his others. He intrudes into the uninhabited spaces of his readers. In his autobiographies, he pitilessly ransacks his former selves. In his essay-novel Elizabeth Costello he combines, with uninhibited humour and irony, contemporary narrative and myth, philosophy and gossip.

Dear John Coetzee,

Your work is limited in pages, limitless in scope. What I have said in Swedish to those present here is merely in so many words: "Don't listen to me, just go home and read, and some images will stay with you forever."

In your own life, you have recently moved along the very latitude that unites Cape Town and Adelaide. You may have left South Africa; it will hardly leave you. For the Swedish Academy, national roots are irrelevant and we do not recognize what in Europe is often called the literary periphery.

You are a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on your own, starting with the basic words for our deepest concerns. Unsettling and surprising us, you have dug deeply into the ground of the human condition with its cruelty and loneliness. You have given a voice to those outside the hierarchies of the mighty. With intellectual honesty and density of feeling, in a prose of icy precision, you have unveiled the masks of our civilization and uncovered the topography of evil.

I would like to express the warmest congratulations of the Swedish Academy as I now request you to receive this year's Nobel Prize for Literature from the hands of His Majesty the King.

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The Nobel Prize
Award Ceremony 2003

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2003/award-video/

[18:12]

A Summary

Watch the 2003 Nobel Laureates in Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine and Literature receive the Nobel Prize medal and diploma and the Economics Laureates the Economics Prize medal and diploma during ceremonies at the Stockholm Concert Hall in Sweden, 10 December 2003.

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Banquet Speech

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2003/coetzee/speech/

[3:21]

J. M. Coetzee's speech at the Nobel Banquet, 10 December 2003.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen; Distinguished Guests, Friends

The other day, suddenly, out of the blue, while we were talking about something completely different, my partner Dorothy burst out as follows: "On the other hand," she said, "*on the other hand*, how proud your mother would have been! What a pity she isn't still alive! And your father too! How proud they would have been of you!"
"Even prouder than of my son the doctor?" I said. "Even prouder than of my son the professor?"

"Even prouder."

"If my mother were still alive," I said, "she would be ninety-nine and a half. She would probably have senile dementia. She would not know what was going on around her."

But of course I missed the point. Dorothy was right. My mother would have been bursting with pride. *My son the Nobel Prize winner*. And for whom, anyway, do we do the things that lead to Nobel Prizes if not for our mothers?

"*Mommy, Mommy, I won a prize!*"
"*That's wonderful, my dear. Now eat your carrots before they get cold.*"

Why must our mothers be ninety-nine and long in the grave before we can come running home with the prize that will make up for all the trouble we have been to them?

To Alfred Nobel, 107 years in the grave, and to the Foundation that so faithfully administers his will and that has created this magnificent evening for us, my heartfelt gratitude. To my parents, how sorry I am that you cannot be here.

Thank you.

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The Nobel Banquet 2003

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2003/banquet-video/

[18:16]

A Summary

Watch a video summary of the Nobel Banquet on 10 December 2003, starting inside the Stockholm City Hall in Sweden, where the distinguished guests make their entrance into the Blue Hall in a grand procession. Champagne is served, and a toast is made to the donor Alfred Nobel (1:17). The first course is served, and the entertainment starts (2:43). Banquet speeches are given by the 2003 Laureates: John M. Coetzee, Nobel Laureate in Literature (5:00), Peter Agre, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry (9:36), and Anthony J. Leggett, Nobel Laureate in Physics (13:02). The guests from the table of honour then leave the Blue Hall in procession (15:50). The after dinner dancing takes place in the Golden Hall (16:47).

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Nobel Prize Lecture

J. M. Coetzee delivered his Nobel Lecture at the Swedish Academy, Stockholm, 7 December 2003.

He was introduced by Horace Engdahl, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy.

Presentation

He and His Man

But to return to my new companion. I was greatly delighted with him, and made it my business to teach him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful; but especially to make him speak, and understand me when I spoke; and he was the aptest scholar there ever was.

— Daniel Defoe, ***Robinson Crusoe***

Boston, on the coast of Lincolnshire, is a handsome town, writes his man. The tallest church steeple in all of England is to be found there; sea-pilots use it to navigate by. Around Boston is fen country. Bitterns abound, ominous birds who give a heavy, groaning call loud enough to be heard two miles away, like the report of a gun.

The fens are home to many other kinds of birds too, writes his man, duck and mallard, teal and widgeon, to capture which the men of the fens, the fen-men, raise tame ducks, which they call decoy ducks or duckoys.

Fens are tracts of wetland. There are tracts of wetland all over Europe, all over the world, but they are not named fens, *fen* is an English word, it will not migrate.These Lincolnshire duckoys, writes his man, are bred up in decoy ponds, and kept tame by being fed by hand. Then when the season comes they are sent abroad to Holland and Germany. In Holland and Germany they meet with others of their kind, and, seeing how miserably these Dutch and German ducks live, how their rivers freeze in winter and their lands are covered in snow, fail not to let them know, in a form of language which they make them understand, that in England from where they come the case is quite otherwise: English ducks have sea shores full of nourishing food, tides that flow freely up the creeks; they have lakes, springs, open ponds and sheltered ponds; also lands full of corn left behind by the gleaners; and no frost or snow, or very light.
By these representations, he writes, which are made all in duck language, they, the decoy ducks or duckoys, draw together vast numbers of fowl and, so to say, kidnap them. They guide them back across the seas from Holland and Germany and settle them down in their decoy ponds on the fens of Lincolnshire, chattering and gabbling to them all the time in their own language, telling them these are the ponds they told them of, where they shall live safely and securely.

And while they are so occupied the decoy-men, the masters of the decoy-ducks, creep into covers or coverts they have built of reeds upon the fens, and all unseen toss handfuls of corn upon the water; and the decoy ducks or duckoys follow them, bringing their foreign guests behind. And so over two or three days they lead their guests up narrower and narrower waterways, calling to them all the time to see how well we live in England, to a place where nets have been spanned.

Then the decoy-men send out their decoy dog, which has been perfectly trained to swim after fowl, barking as he swims. Being alarmed to the last degree by this terrible creature, the ducks take to the wing, but are forced down again into the water by the arched nets above, and so must swim or perish, under the net. But the net grows narrower and

narrower, like a purse, and at the end stand the decoy men, who take their captives out one by one. The decoy ducks are stroked and made much of, but as for their guests, these are clubbed on the spot and plucked and sold by the hundred and by the thousand.

All of this news of Lincolnshire his man writes in a neat, quick hand, with quills that he sharpens with his little pen-knife each day before a new bout with the page.

In Halifax, writes his man, there stood, until it was removed in the reign of King James the First, an engine of execution, which worked thus. The condemned man was laid with his head on the cross-base or cup of the scaffold; then the executioner knocked out a pin which held up the heavy blade. The blade descended down a frame as tall as a church door and beheaded the man as clean as a butcher's knife.

Custom had it in Halifax, though, that if between the knocking out of the pin and the descent of the blade the condemned man could leap to his feet, run down the hill, and swim across the river without being seized again by the executioner, he would be let free. But in all the years the engine stood in Halifax this never happened.

He (not his man now but he) sits in his room by the waterside in Bristol and reads this. He is getting on in years, almost it might be said he is an old man by now. The skin of his face, that had been almost blackened by the tropic sun before he made a parasol out of palm or palmetto leaves to shade himself, is paler now, but still leathery like parchment; on his nose is a sore from the sun that will not heal.

The parasol he has still with him in his room, standing in a corner, but the parrot that came back with him has passed away. *Poor Robin!* the parrot would squawk from its perch on his shoulder, *Poor Robin Crusoe! Who shall save poor Robin?* His wife could not abide the lamenting of the parrot, *Poor Robin* day in, day out. *I shall wring its neck,* said she, but she had not the courage to do so.

When he came back to England from his island with his parrot and his parasol and his chest full of treasure, he lived for a while tranquilly enough with his old wife on the estate he bought in Huntingdon, for he had become a wealthy man, and wealthier still after the printing of the book of his adventures. But the years in the island, and then the years traveling with his serving-man Friday (poor Friday, he laments to himself, squawk-squawk, for the parrot would never speak Friday's name, only his), had made the life of a landed gentleman dull for him. And, if the truth be told, married life was a sore disappointment too. He found himself retreating more and more to the stables, to his horses, which blessedly did not chatter, but whinnied softly when he came, to show that they knew who he was, and then held their peace.

It seemed to him, coming from his island, where until Friday arrived he lived a silent life, that there was too much speech in the world. In bed beside his wife he felt as if a shower of pebbles were being poured upon his head, in an unending rustle and clatter, when all he desired was to sleep.

So when his old wife gave up the ghost he mourned but was not sorry. He buried her and after a decent while took this room in *The Jolly Tar* on the Bristol waterfront, leaving

the direction of the estate in Huntingdon to his son, bringing with him only the parasol from the island that made him famous and the dead parrot fixed to its perch and a few necessaries, and has lived here alone ever since, strolling by day about the wharves and quays, staring out west over the sea, for his sight is still keen, smoking his pipes. As to his meals, he has these brought up to his room; for he finds no joy in society, having grown used to solitude on the island

.

He does not read, he has lost the taste for it; but the writing of his adventures has put him in the habit of writing, it is a pleasant enough recreation. In the evening by candlelight he will take out his papers and sharpen his quills and write a page or two of his man, the man who sends report of the duckoys of Lincolnshire, and of the great engine of death in Halifax, that one can escape if before the awful blade can descend one can leap to one's feet and dash down the hill, and of numbers of other things. Every place he goes he sends report of, that is his first business, this busy man of his.

Strolling along the harbour wall, reflecting upon the engine from Halifax, he, Robin, whom the parrot used to call poor Robin, drops a pebble and listens. A second, less than a second, before it strikes the water. God's grace is swift, but might not the great blade of tempered steel, being heavier than a pebble and being greased with tallow, be swifter? How will we ever escape it? And what species of man can it be who will dash so busily hither and thither across the kingdom, from one spectacle of death to another (clubbings, beheadings), sending in report after report?

A man of business, he thinks to himself. Let him be a man of business, a grain merchant or a leather merchant, let us say; or a manufacturer and purveyor of roof tiles somewhere where clay is plentiful, Wapping let us say, who must travel much in the interest of his trade. Make him prosperous, give him a wife who loves him and does not chatter too much and bears him children, daughters mainly; give him a reasonable happiness; then bring his happiness suddenly to an end. The Thames rises one winter, the kilns in which the tiles are baked are washed away, or the grain stores, or the leather works; he is ruined, this man of his, debtors descend upon him like flies or like crows, he has to flee his home, his wife, his children, and seek hiding in the most wretched of quarters in Beggars Lane under a false name and in disguise. And all of this – the wave of water, the ruin, the flight, the pennilessness, the tatters, the solitude – let all of this be a figure of the shipwreck and the island where he, poor Robin, was secluded from the world for twenty-six years, till he almost went mad (and indeed, who is to say he did not, in some measure?).

Or else let the man be a saddler with a home and a shop and a warehouse in Whitechapel and a mole on his chin and a wife who loves him and does not chatter and bears him children, daughters mainly, and gives him much happiness, until the plague descends upon the city, it is the year 1665, the great fire of London has not yet come. The plague descends upon London: daily, parish by parish, the count of the dead mounts, rich and poor, for the plague makes no distinction among stations, all this saddler's worldly wealth will not save him. He sends his wife and daughters into the countryside and makes plans to flee himself, but then does not. *Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror at night,* he reads, opening the Bible at hazard, *not for the arrow that flieth by day; not for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee.*

Taking heart from this sign, a sign of safe passage, he remains in afflicted London and sets about writing reports. I came upon a crowd in the street, he writes, and a woman in their midst pointing to the heavens. *See,* she cries, *an angel in white brandishing a flaming sword!* And the crowd all nod among themselves, *Indeed it is so,* they say: *an angel with a sword!* But he, the saddler, can see no angel, no sword. All he can see is a strange-shaped cloud brighter on the one side than the other, from the shining of the sun. *It is an allegory!* cries the woman in the street; but he can see no allegory for the life of him. Thus, in his report.

On another day, walking by the riverside in Wapping, his man that used to be a saddler but now has no occupation observes how a woman from the door of her house calls out to a man rowing in a dory: *Robert! Robert!* she calls; and how the man then rows ashore, and from the dory takes up a sack which he lays upon a stone by the riverside, and rows away again; and how the woman comes down to the riverside and picks up the sack and bears it home, very sorrowful-looking.

He accosts the man Robert and speaks to him. Robert informs him that the woman is his wife and the sack holds a week's supplies for her and their children, meat and meal and butter; but that he dare not approach nearer, for all of them, wife and children, have the plague upon them; and that it breaks his heart. And all of this – the man Robert and wife keeping communion through calls across the water, the sack left by the waterside – stands for itself certainly, but stands also as a figure of his, Robinson's, solitude on his island, where in his hour of darkest despair he called out across the waves to his loved ones in England to save him, and at other times swam out to the wreck in search of supplies.

Further report from that time of woe. Able no longer to bear the pain from the swellings in the groin and armpit that are the signs of the plague, a man runs out howling, stark naked, into the street, into Harrow Alley in Whitechapel, where his man the saddler witnesses him as he leaps and prances and makes a thousand strange gestures, his wife and children running after him crying out, calling to him to come back. And this leaping and prancing is allegoric of his own leaping and prancing when, after the calamity of the shipwreck and after he had scoured the strand for sign of his shipboard companions and found none, save a pair of shoes that were not mates, he had understood he was cast up all alone on a savage island, likely to perish and with no hope of salvation.

(But of what else does he secretly sing, he wonders to himself, this poor afflicted man of whom he reads, besides his desolation? What is he calling, across the waters and across the years, out of his private fire?)

A year ago he, Robinson, paid two guineas to a sailor for a parrot the sailor had brought back from, he said, Brazil – a bird not so magnificent as his own well-beloved creature but splendid nonetheless, with green feathers and a scarlet crest and a great talker too, if the sailor was to be believed. And indeed the bird would sit on its perch in his room in the inn, with a little chain on its leg in case it should try to fly away, and say the words *Poor Poll! Poor Poll!* over and over till he was forced to hood it; but could not be taught to say any other word, *Poor Robin!* for instance, being perhaps too old for that.
Poor Poll, gazing out through the narrow window over the mast-tops and, beyond the mast-tops, over the grey Atlantic swell: *What island is this,* asks Poor Poll, *that I am cast up on, so cold, so dreary? Where were you, my Saviour, in my hour of great need?*

A man, being drunk and it being late at night (another of his man's reports), falls asleep in a doorway in Cripplegate. The dead-cart comes on its way (we are still in the year of the plague), and the neighbours, thinking the man dead, place him on the dead-cart among the corpses. By and by the cart comes to the dead pit at Mountmill and the carter, his face all muffled against the effluvium, lays hold of him to throw him in; and he wakes up and struggles in his bewilderment. *Where am I?* he says. *You are about to be buried among the dead,* says the carter. *But am I dead then?* says the man. And this too is a figure of him on his island.

Some London-folk continue to go about their business, thinking they are healthy and will be passed over. But secretly they have the plague in their blood: when the infection reaches their heart they fall dead upon the spot, so reports his man, as if struck by lightning. And this is a figure for life itself, the whole of life. Due preparation. We should make due preparation for death, or else be struck down where we stand. As he, Robinson, was made to see when of a sudden, on his island, he came one day upon the footprint of a man in the sand. It was a print, and therefore a sign: of a foot, of a man. But it was a sign of much else too. *You are not alone,* said the sign; and also, *No matter how far you sail, no matter where you hide, you will be searched out.*
In the year of the plague, writes his man, others, out of terror, abandoned all, their homes, their wives and children, and fled as far from London as they could. When the plague had passed, their flight was condemned as cowardice on all sides. But, writes his man, we forget what kind of courage was called on to confront the plague. It was not a mere soldier's courage, like gripping a weapon and charging the foe: it was like charging Death itself on his pale horse.

Even at his best, his island parrot, the better loved of the two, spoke no word he was not taught to speak by his master. How then has it come about that this man of his, who is a kind of parrot and not much loved, writes as well as or better than his master? For he wields an able pen, this man of his, no doubt of that. *Like charging Death himself on his pale horse.* His own skill, learned in the counting house, was in making tallies and accounts, not in turning phrases. *Death himself on his pale horse:* those are words he would not think of. Only when he yields himself up to this man of his do such words come.
And decoy ducks, or duckoys: What did he, Robinson, know of decoy ducks? Nothing at all, until this man of his began sending in reports.

The duckoys of the Lincolnshire fens, the great engine of execution in Halifax: reports from a great tour this man of his seems to be making of the island of Britain, which is a figure of the tour he made of his own island in the skiff he built, the tour that showed there was a farther side to the island, craggy and dark and inhospitable, which he ever afterwards avoided, though if in the future colonists shall arrive upon the island they will perhaps explore it and settle it; that too being a figure, of the dark side of the soul and the light.

When the first bands of plagiarists and imitators descended upon his island history and foisted on the public their own feigned stories of the castaway life, they seemed to him no more or less than a horde of cannibals falling upon his own flesh, that is to say, his life; and he did not scruple to say so. *When I defended myself against the cannibals, who sought to strike me down and roast me and devour me,* he wrote, *I thought I defended myself against the thing itself. Little did I guess,* he wrote, *that these cannibals were but figures of a more devilish voracity, that would gnaw at the very substance of truth.*

But now, reflecting further, there begins to creep into his breast a touch of fellow-feeling for his imitators. For it seems to him now that there are but a handful of stories in the world; and if the young are to be forbidden to prey upon the old then they must sit for ever in silence.

Thus in the narrative of his island adventures he tells of how he awoke in terror one night convinced the devil lay upon him in his bed in the shape of a huge dog. So he leapt to his feet and grasped a cutlass and slashed left and right to defend himself while the poor parrot that slept by his bedside shrieked in alarm. Only many days later did he understand that neither dog nor devil had lain upon him, but rather that he had suffered a palsy of a passing kind, and being unable to move his leg had concluded there was some creature stretched out upon it. Of which event the lesson would seem to be that all afflictions, including the palsy, come from the devil and are the very devil; that a visitation by illness may be figured as a visitation by the devil, or by a dog figuring the devil, and vice versa, the visitation figured as an illness, as in the saddler's history of the plague; and therefore that no one who writes stories of either, the devil or the plague, should forthwith be dismissed as a forger or a thief.

When, years ago, he resolved to set down on paper the story of his island, he found that the words would not come, the pen would not flow, his very fingers were stiff and reluctant. But day by day, step by step, he mastered the writing business, until by the time of his adventures with Friday in the frozen north the pages were rolling off easily, even thoughtlessly.

That old ease of composition has, alas, deserted him. When he seats himself at the little writing-desk before the window looking over Bristol harbour, his hand feels as clumsy and the pen as foreign an instrument as ever before.

Does he, the other one, that man of his, find the writing business easier? The stories he writes of ducks and machines of death and London under the plague flow prettily enough; but then so did his own stories once. Perhaps he misjudges him, that dapper little man with the quick step and the mole upon his chin. Perhaps at this very moment he sits alone in a hired room somewhere in this wide kingdom dipping the pen and dipping it again, full of doubts and hesitations and second thoughts.

How are they to be figured, this man and he? As master and slave? As brothers, twin brothers? As comrades in arms? Or as enemies, foes? What name shall he give this nameless fellow with whom he shares his evenings and sometimes his nights too, who is absent only in the daytime, when he, Robin, walks the quays inspecting the new arrivals and his man gallops about the kingdom making his inspections?

Will this man, in the course of his travels, ever come to Bristol? He yearns to meet the fellow in the flesh, shake his hand, take a stroll with him along the quayside and hearken as he tells of his visit to the dark north of the island, or of his adventures in the writing business. But he fears there will be no meeting, not in this life. If he must settle on a likeness for the pair of them, his man and he, he would write that they are like two ships sailing in contrary directions, one west, the other east. Or better, that they are deckhands toiling in the rigging, the one on a ship sailing west, the other on a ship sailing east. Their ships pass close, close enough to hail. But the seas are rough, the weather is stormy:

their eyes lashed by the spray, their hands burned by the cordage, they pass each other by, too busy even to wave.

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Prose

Excerpts from *Disgrace*
(Pages 111-112 and 183-184)

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Press Release

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

The Permanent Secretary
Press release
2 October 2003

The Nobel Prize in Literature 2003
John Maxwell Coetzee

The Nobel Prize in Literature for 2003 is awarded to the South African writer John Maxwell Coetzee

"who in innumerable guises portrays the surprising involvement of the outsider".

J.M. Coetzee's novels are characterised by their well-crafted composition, pregnant dialogue and analytical brilliance. But at the same time he is a scrupulous doubter, ruthless in his criticism of the cruel rationalism and cosmetic morality of western civilisation. His intellectual honesty erodes all basis of consolation and distances itself from the tawdry drama of remorse and confession. Even when his own convictions emerge to view, as in his defence of the rights of animals, he elucidates the premises on which they are based rather than arguing for them.

Coetzee's interest is directed mainly at situations where the distinction between right and wrong, while crystal clear, can be seen to serve no end. Like the man in the famous Magritte painting who is studying his neck in a mirror, at the decisive moment Coetzee's characters stand behind themselves, motionless, incapable of taking part in their own actions. But passivity is not merely the dark haze that devours personality, it is also the last resort open to human beings as they defy an oppressive order by

rendering themselves inaccessible to its intentions. It is in exploring weakness and defeat that Coetzee captures the divine spark in man.

His earliest novel, *Dusklands,* was the first example of the capacity for empathy that has enabled Coetzee time and again to creep beneath the skin of the alien and the abhorrent. A man working for the American administration during the Vietnam war dreams of devising an unbeatable system of psychological warfare, while at the same time his private life disintegrates around him. His reflections are juxtaposed with a report on an expedition to explore the country of the native Africans, which purports to have been written by one of the 18th-century Boer pioneers. Two forms of misanthropy, one of them intellectual and megalomaniac, the other vital and barbaric, reflect each other.

One element in his next novel, *In the Heart of the Country,* is the portrayal of psychosis. A careworn spinster living with her father observes with distaste his love affair with a young coloured woman. She has fantasies of murdering both of them, but everything seems to indicate that she decides rather to immure herself in a perverse pact with the house servant. The actual sequence of events cannot be determined, as the reader's only sources are her notes, where lies and truths, crudeness and refinement alternate capriciously line by line. The high-flown Edwardian literary style of the woman's monologue harmonises strangely with the surrounding African landscape.

Waiting for the Barbarians is a political thriller in the tradition of Joseph Conrad, in which the idealist's naivety opens the gates to horror. The playful metanovel *Foe* spins a yarn about the incompatibility and inseparability of literature and life, told by a woman who yearns to be part of a major narrative when in reality only one of minor importance is offered.

With *Life and Times of Michael K,* which has its roots in Defoe as well as in Kafka and Beckett, the impression that Coetzee is a writer of solitude becomes clearer. The novel deals with the flight of an insignificant citizen from growing disorder and impending war to a state of indifference to all needs and speechlessness that negates the logic of power.

The Master of Petersburg is a paraphrase of Dostoevsky's life and fictional world. To die in one's heart away from the world, the temptation that Coetzee's imagined characters face, turns out to be the principle of the unconscionable liberty of terrorism. Here, the writer's struggle with the problem of evil is tinged with demonology, an element that recurs in his most recently published work, *Elizabeth Costello.*

In *Disgrace* Coetzee involves us in the struggle of a discredited university teacher to defend his own and his daughter's honour in the new circumstances that have arisen in South Africa after the collapse of white supremacy. The novel deals with a question that is central to his works: Is it possible to evade history?

His autobiographical *Boyhood* circles mainly around his father's humiliation and the psychological cleavage it has caused the son, but the book also

conveys a magic impression of life in the old-fashioned South African countryside with its eternal conflicts between the Boers and the English and between white and black. In its sequel, *Youth,* the writer dissects himself as a young man with a cruelty that is oddly consoling for anyone able to identify with him.
There is a great wealth of variety in Coetzee's works. No two books ever follow the same recipe. Extensive reading reveals a recurring pattern, the downward spiralling journeys he considers necessary for the salvation of his characters. His protagonists are overwhelmed by the urge to sink but paradoxically derive strength from being stripped of all external dignity.

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Major Awards & Honours

- **Nobel Prize in Literature:** Awarded in 2003.
- **Booker Prize:** Won twice, for *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999).
- **CNA Prize:** Won three times.
- **Jerusalem Prize:** Awarded for his contributions to the freedom of the individual in society.
- **Irish Times International Fiction Prize:** Won the award for his fiction.
- **Prix Femina Étranger:** A French literary prize awarded for works translated into French.
- Coetzee is a three-time winner of South Africa's CNA Literary Award (in 1977, 1980 and 1983).
- His Waiting for the Barbarians received both the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize
- His *Age of Iron* was awarded the Sunday Express Book of the Year award
- His *The Master of Petersburg* was awarded The Irish Times International Fiction Prize in 1995
- He has also won the French Prix Femina étranger and two Commonwealth Writers' Prizes for the African region, for Master of St Petersburg in 1995 and for Disgrace in 2000 (the latter personally presented by Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace)
- In 1987 his Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society.
- In 1998, he received the Lannan Literary Award for Fiction.
- In 1984, Coetzee received an Honorary Fellow Award at the University of Cape Town.
- He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (FRSL) in 1988.

- In 2001 he won the Outstanding Alumnus award at the University of Texas.
- In 2004, he was made Honorary Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.
- On 27 September 2005, the South African government awarded Coetzee the Order of Mapungubwe (gold class) for his "exceptional contribution in the field of literature and for putting South Africa on the world stage".
- In 2006, he was elected to the American Philosophical Society.
- He holds honorary doctorates from The American University of Paris (2010), the University of Adelaide (2005), La Trobe University, the University of Natal, [20] the University of Oxford,[57] Rhodes University, the State University of New York at Buffalo, the University of Strathclyde,[46] the University of Technology, Sydney, the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and the Universidad Iberoamericana.
- On 9 June 2025 Coetzee was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia

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Videos

01] J. M. Coetzee and Valerie Miles. Europe and the world outside | CCCB

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhs9G2EF7Fs [1:16:12]

The 2003 Nobel Literature Laureate J. M. Coetzee talks with writer and editor Valerie Miles about the visions of Europe in extra-European literature; the place of Russia inside (or outside) Europe; and the spread of English as a world language.

02] J.M. Coetzee: "Growing Up with The Children's Encyclopedia": Neubauer Collegium Director's Lecture

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJU0pNyQSzs [1:19:03]

Nobel Prize-winning author J. M. Coetzee, who served as a faculty member at the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought from 1998 to 2003, returned to campus to deliver a Neubauer Collegium Director's Lecture on "Growing Up with The Children's Encyclopedia."

03] John M Coetzee 80th Birthday Celebration

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2cQad6g9QQ [1:37:17]

The University of Adelaide is proud to host a formal event in Elder Hall with music performances, tributes and readings to honour and celebrate John M Coetzee in his 80th year, followed by book signing in Elder Hall Foyer.

04]Nobel Literature Laureate J. M. Coetzee, Europe and the World Outside

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPBjlWe7r4w [1:16:12]

Nobel Literature Laureate J. M. Coetzee talks with writer and editor Valerie Miles.

05] "The Lives of Animals" by J. M. Coetzee: A Webinar Celebrating Its 25th Anniversary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kN3sUBTMLNA [1:08:22]

In this video—hosted by the Culture & Animals Foundation, which awarded its 2024 Nancy Regan Arts Prize to J. M. Coetzee, recipient of the 2003 Nobel Prize for Literature—three scholars discuss Coetzee's "The Lives of Animals". The scholars are: Robert McKay, Professor of Contemporary Literature at the University of Sheffield, U.K.; Alexandra Boehm, Senior Lecturer at the University of Erlangen and curator at the German National Museum in Nürnberg; and Richard Alan Northover, Professor of the Theory of Literature at the University of South Africa in Pretoria.

06] Conferencia John M. Coetzee (ENGLISH)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zd2MwKYdT70 [1:04:35]

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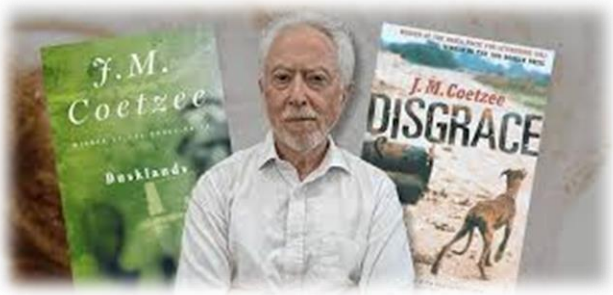

10 Oct 1930

24 Dec 2008

Harold Pinter

Nobel Prize in Literature 2005

Born: 10 October 1930, London, United Kingdom
Died: 24 December 2008, London, United Kingdom
Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom

Prize motivation:

"who in his plays uncovers the precipice
under everyday prattle and forces
entry into oppression's closed rooms"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2005/pinter/facts/

Links to other sites

[01] On Harold Pinter from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] The Harold Pinter Society
[03] Harold Pinter and his Plays
[04] Obituary from 'The Guardian'

Nobel Diploma

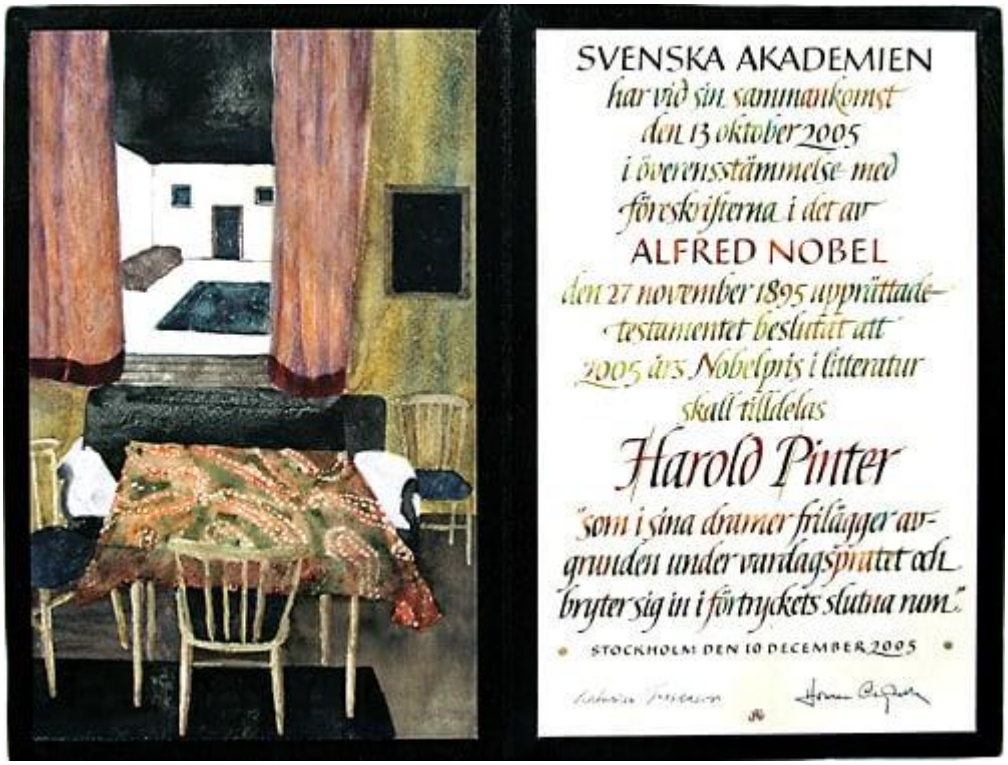

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Photo Gallery

Kindly visit the Web Page to view Photos

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2005/pinter/photo-gallery/

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Prize Announcement

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2005/prize-announcement/

Announcement of the 2005 Nobel Prize in Literature to Harold Pinter, presented by Professor Horace Engdahl, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, on 13 October 2005.

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Writer Per Wästberg, Member of the Swedish Academy, Chairman of its Nobel Committee, December 10, 2005.

Per Wästberg delivering the Presentation Speech for the 20(
Nobel Prize in Literature at the Stockholm Concert Hall.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Esteemed Nobel Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Harold Pinter is the renewer of English drama in the 20th century. "Pinteresque" is an adjective listed in the Oxford Dictionary. Like Kafka, Proust and Graham Greene he has charted a territory, a Pinterland with a distinct topography.

With his twenty-nine plays and about a hundred that he has directed or acted in, he has made the theatre his own domain. His figures barricade themselves in unpredictable dialogues. Between the lines of unresolved threats, it roils and stings. What we hear are signals for everything we do not hear.

The abyss under chat, the unwillingness to communicate other than superficially, the need to rule and mislead, the suffocating sensation of accidents bubbling under the quotidian, the nervous perception that a dangerous story has been censored – all this vibrates through Pinter's drama.

His characters are at the mercy of each other on the periphery of life. They are also prisoners in the limbo of class divisions, set phrases and solidified habits. Their identities, backgrounds and histories are vague, and different versions exist depending on who is remembering. They seldom listen to each other but it is precisely their mental deafness that makes us listen. Not a word passes unnoticed, nor can we relax a single minute. Atmospheric pressure fluctuates as secrets unroll and shift the distribution of power.

Memories – invented, manipulated or real – flow as a hot undercurrent through Pinter's plays. We model the past to respond to the demands of the present and to form our future.

As closed rooms open to an international community, Pinter redefines romantic love as a more resilient love that includes friendship and the exigency to promote justice

through action. In *Mountain Language*, love takes the form of an unconditional generosity missing in his earlier works. To survive, we must do good deeds and stand up for the enslaved in this age of terror and spiralling violence.

It is usually said that Pinter's political commitment came late. But Pinter himself describes even his first period – *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Birthday Party*, *The Hothouse* – as political. In these "comedies of menace", language is a weapon of aggression, evasion and torture. The early works can be seen as metaphors for authoritarian intervention on several levels: the power of the state, the power of the family, the power of religion – all undermining the individual's critical questions. Pinter uncovers the reasons for wanting to destroy the identity of others and the fear disguised as violence against those who stand outside the party, club or nation. Pinter's work has neither winners nor losers. In the power game between characters, we seldom know who has the upper hand; they change places, growing and sinking through lines that seldom seem deliberate. The characters have sides invisible to the eye, exposed in the ultraviolet rays of ambiguity. They grope forward between invisible walls and stratify into different levels of reality. In defending themselves against intrusion, they blockade themselves in spaces mined like alien terrain.

Pinter has perforated conventionally realistic drama with taciturnity's mystery, and has equipped his overblown figures with so many outlets that we can live with the characters and see them age and decay as we do. The solid and impenetrable figures of public life disintegrate in disastrous incoherence. They send messages that never seem to arrive, yet we leave the theatre less righteous than on entering.

For systematists, the world exists to put in order. For Harold Pinter it is for dissembling, through which the good and the humane find a way to seep out through the bureaucratic cage of ingrained reflexes. In a ruthless analysis of the totalitarian, he illuminates the pain of the individual.

Throwaway lines sting, little words corrode, what is half-said crushes, what is tacit forebodes catastrophe. Pinter, the tailor's son, scissors language, allowing the action to originate from the voices and rhythms of the characters. Thus, there is no given plot. We do not ask: "What will happen next"? Rather, "What is happening"?

The words are instruments of power. Words are repeated until they resemble truth. In a time of over-information, Pinter frees words from describing reality and makes them reality itself, at times poetic, more often oppressive. At the end, it is only through language that we can erase our destiny and recreate it.

Dear Harold Pinter,

In its choice of a Nobel Laureate the Swedish Academy recognises only the creative power of a single individual regardless of nation, sex and literary genre. This needs emphasising. However British you may appear in the eyes of many, your international and inter-human impact in the field of drama has been uniquely strong and inspiring for half a century. If someone thinks your prize

is late in coming, we may reply that at any given moment somewhere in the world your plays are reinterpreted by new generations of directors and actors.

In your works, seductively accessible and frighteningly mysterious, the curtain rises on dense life-landscapes and harrowing confinement. In poetic images, you illuminate an existence where fantasy and the nightmare of reality clash.

In the absence of this year's Nobel Laureate in Literature, I request his publisher Mr. Stephen Page to come forward and receive Mr. Pinter's Prize from the hands of His Majesty the King.

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The Nobel Prize
Award Ceremony 2005

Kindly visit the Web Page to view the Ceremony

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2005/award-video/

[1:03:19]

Watch the 2005 Nobel Laureates in Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine and Literature receive the Nobel Prize medal and diploma, and the Economics Laureates the Economics Prize medal and diploma during ceremonies at the Stockholm Concert Hall in Sweden, 10 December 2005.

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Nobel Prize Lecture

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2005/pinter/lecture/

[46:30]

Harold Pinter's Nobel Lecture was pre-recorded, and shown on video on 7 December 2005, in Börssalen at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm.

Art, Truth & Politics

In 1958 I wrote the following:

'There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.'

I believe that these assertions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false?

Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task. More often than not you stumble upon the truth in the dark, colliding with it or just glimpsing an image or a shape which seems to correspond to the truth, often without realising that you have done so. But the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other. Sometimes you feel you have the truth of a moment in your hand, then it slips through your fingers and is lost.

I have often been asked how my plays come about. I cannot say. Nor can I ever sum up my plays, except to say that this is what happened. That is what they said. That is what they did.

Most of the plays are engendered by a line, a word or an image. The given word is often shortly followed by the image. I shall give two examples of two lines which came right out of the blue into my head, followed by an image, followed by me.

The plays are *The Homecoming* and *Old Times*. The first line of *The Homecoming* is 'What have you done with the scissors?' The first line of *Old Times* is 'Dark.'
In each case I had no further information.

In the first case someone was obviously looking for a pair of scissors and was demanding their whereabouts of someone else he suspected had probably stolen them. But I somehow knew that the person addressed didn't give a damn about the scissors or about the questioner either, for that matter.

'Dark' I took to be a description of someone's hair, the hair of a woman, and was the answer to a question. In each case I found myself compelled to pursue the matter. This happened visually, a very slow fade, through shadow into light.

I always start a play by calling the characters A, B and C.

In the play that became *The Homecoming* I saw a man enter a stark room and ask his question of a younger man sitting on an ugly sofa reading a racing paper. I somehow suspected that A was a father and that B was his son, but I had no proof. This was however confirmed a short time later when B (later to become Lenny) says to A (later to become Max), 'Dad, do you mind if I change the subject? I want to ask you something. The dinner we had before, what was the name of it? What do you call it? Why don't you buy a dog? You're a dog cook. Honest. You think you're cooking for a lot of dogs.' So since B calls A 'Dad' it seemed to me reasonable to assume that they were father and son. A was also clearly the cook and his cooking

did not seem to be held in high regard. Did this mean that there was no mother? I didn't know. But, as I told myself at the time, our beginnings never know our ends. 'Dark.' A large window. Evening sky. A man, A (later to become Deeley), and a woman, B (later to become Kate), sitting with drinks. 'Fat or thin?' the man asks. Who are they talking about? But I then see, standing at the window, a woman, C (later to become Anna), in another condition of light, her back to them, her hair dark.

It's a strange moment, the moment of creating characters who up to that moment have had no existence. What follows is fitful, uncertain, even hallucinatory, although sometimes it can be an unstoppable avalanche. The author's position is an odd one. In a sense he is not welcomed by the characters. The characters resist him, they are not easy to live with, they are impossible to define. You certainly can't dictate to them. To a certain extent you play a never-ending game with them, cat and mouse, blind man's buff, hide and seek. But finally you find that you have people of flesh and blood on your hands, people with will and an individual sensibility of their own, made out of component parts you are unable to change, manipulate or distort.

So language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction, a quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author, at any time.

But as I have said, the search for the truth can never stop. It cannot be adjourned, it cannot be postponed. It has to be faced, right there, on the spot.

Political theatre presents an entirely different set of problems. Sermonising has to be avoided at all cost. Objectivity is essential. The characters must be allowed to breathe their own air. The author cannot confine and constrict them to satisfy his own taste or disposition or prejudice. He must be prepared to approach them from a variety of angles, from a full and uninhibited range of perspectives, take them by surprise, perhaps, occasionally, but nevertheless give them the freedom to go which way they will. This does not always work. And political satire, of course, adheres to none of these precepts, in fact does precisely the opposite, which is its proper function.

In my play *The Birthday Party* I think I allow a whole range of options to operate in a dense forest of possibility before finally focussing on an act of subjugation.
Mountain Language pretends to no such range of operation. It remains brutal, short and ugly. But the soldiers in the play do get some fun out of it. One sometimes forgets that torturers become easily bored. They need a bit of a laugh to keep their spirits up. This has been confirmed of course by the events at Abu Ghraib in Baghdad. *Mountain Language* lasts only 20 minutes, but it could go on for hour after hour, on and on and on, the same pattern repeated over and over again, on and on, hour after hour.

Ashes to Ashes, on the other hand, seems to me to be taking place under water. A drowning woman, her hand reaching up through the waves, dropping down out of sight, reaching for others, but finding nobody there, either above or under the water, finding only shadows, reflections, floating; the woman a lost figure in a

drowning landscape, a woman unable to escape the doom that seemed to belong only to others.

But as they died, she must die too.

Political language, as used by politicians, does not venture into any of this territory since the majority of politicians, on the evidence available to us, are interested not in truth but in power and in the maintenance of that power. To maintain that power it is essential that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. What surrounds us therefore is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed.

As every single person here knows, the justification for the invasion of Iraq was that Saddam Hussein possessed a highly dangerous body of weapons of mass destruction, some of which could be fired in 45 minutes, bringing about appalling devastation. We were assured that was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq had a relationship with Al Quaeda and shared responsibility for the atrocity in New York of September 11th 2001. We were assured that this was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq threatened the security of the world. We were assured it was true. It was not true.

The truth is something entirely different. The truth is to do with how the United States understands its role in the world and how it chooses to embody it.

But before I come back to the present I would like to look at the recent past, by which I mean United States foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. I believe it is obligatory upon us to subject this period to at least some kind of even limited scrutiny, which is all that time will allow here.

Everyone knows what happened in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe during the post-war period: the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought. All this has been fully documented and verified.

But my contention here is that the US crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged, let alone recognised as crimes at all. I believe this must be addressed and that the truth has considerable bearing on where the world stands now. Although constrained, to a certain extent, by the existence of the Soviet Union, the United States' actions throughout the world made it clear that it had concluded it had carte blanche to do what it liked.

Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America's favoured method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as 'low intensity conflict'. Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop. It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued – or beaten to death – the same thing – and

your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the camera and say that democracy has prevailed. This was a commonplace in US foreign policy in the years to which I refer.

The tragedy of Nicaragua was a highly significant case. I choose to offer it here as a potent example of America's view of its role in the world, both then and now.

I was present at a meeting at the US embassy in London in the late 1980s.

The United States Congress was about to decide whether to give more money to the Contras in their campaign against the state of Nicaragua. I was a member of a delegation speaking on behalf of Nicaragua but the most important member of this delegation was a Father John Metcalf. The leader of the US body was Raymond Seitz (then number two to the ambassador, later ambassador himself). Father Metcalf said: 'Sir, I am in charge of a parish in the north of Nicaragua. My parishioners built a school, a health centre, a cultural centre. We have lived in peace. A few months ago a Contra force attacked the parish. They destroyed everything: the school, the health centre, the cultural centre. They raped nurses and teachers, slaughtered doctors, in the most brutal manner. They behaved like savages. Please demand that the US government withdraw its support from this shocking terrorist activity.'

Raymond Seitz had a very good reputation as a rational, responsible and highly sophisticated man. He was greatly respected in diplomatic circles. He listened, paused and then spoke with some gravity. 'Father,' he said, 'let me tell you something. In war, innocent people always suffer.' There was a frozen silence. We stared at him. He did not flinch.

Innocent people, indeed, always suffer.

Finally somebody said: 'But in this case "innocent people" were the victims of a gruesome atrocity subsidised by your government, one among many. If Congress allows the Contras more money further atrocities of this kind will take place. Is this not the case? Is your government not therefore guilty of supporting acts of murder and destruction upon the citizens of a sovereign state?'

Seitz was imperturbable. 'I don't agree that the facts as presented support your assertions,' he said.

As we were leaving the Embassy a US aide told me that he enjoyed my plays. I did not reply.

I should remind you that at the time President Reagan made the following statement: 'The Contras are the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers.'

The United States supported the brutal Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua for over 40 years. The Nicaraguan people, led by the Sandinistas, overthrew this regime in 1979, a breathtaking popular revolution.

The Sandinistas weren't perfect. They possessed their fair share of arrogance and their political philosophy contained a number of contradictory elements. But they were intelligent, rational and civilised. They set out to establish a stable, decent, pluralistic society. The death penalty was abolished. Hundreds of thousands of poverty-stricken peasants were brought back from the dead. Over 100,000 families were given title to land. Two thousand schools were built. A quite remarkable literacy campaign reduced illiteracy in the country to less than one seventh. Free education was established and a free health service. Infant mortality was reduced by a third. Polio was eradicated.

The United States denounced these achievements as Marxist/Leninist subversion. In the view of the US government, a dangerous example was being set. If Nicaragua was allowed to establish basic norms of social and economic justice, if it was allowed to raise the standards of health care and education and achieve social unity and national self respect, neighbouring countries would ask the same questions and do the same things. There was of course at the time fierce resistance to the status quo in El Salvador.

I spoke earlier about 'a tapestry of lies' which surrounds us. President Reagan commonly described Nicaragua as a 'totalitarian dungeon'. This was taken generally by the media, and certainly by the British government, as accurate and fair comment. But there was in fact no record of death squads under the Sandinista government. There was no record of torture. There was no record of systematic or official military brutality. No priests were ever murdered in Nicaragua. There were in fact three priests in the government, two Jesuits and a Maryknoll missionary. The totalitarian dungeons were actually next door, in El Salvador and Guatemala. The United States had brought down the democratically elected government of Guatemala in 1954 and it is estimated that over 200,000 people had been victims of successive military dictatorships.

Six of the most distinguished Jesuits in the world were viciously murdered at the Central American University in San Salvador in 1989 by a battalion of the Alcatl regiment trained at Fort Benning, Georgia, USA. That extremely brave man Archbishop Romero was assassinated while saying mass. It is estimated that 75,000 people died. Why were they killed? They were killed because they believed a better life was possible and should be achieved. That belief immediately qualified them as communists. They died because they dared to question the status quo, the endless plateau of poverty, disease, degradation and oppression, which had been their birthright.

The United States finally brought down the Sandinista government. It took some years and considerable resistance but relentless economic persecution and 30,000 dead finally undermined the spirit of the Nicaraguan people. They were exhausted and poverty stricken once again. The casinos moved back into the country. Free

health and free education were over. Big business returned with a vengeance. 'Democracy' had prevailed.

But this 'policy' was by no means restricted to Central America. It was conducted throughout the world. It was never-ending. And it is as if it never happened.

The United States supported and in many cases engendered every right wing military dictatorship in the world after the end of the Second World War. I refer to Indonesia, Greece, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Haiti, Turkey, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, and, of course, Chile. The horror the United States inflicted upon Chile in 1973 can never be purged and can never be forgiven.

Hundreds of thousands of deaths took place throughout these countries. Did they take place? And are they in all cases attributable to US foreign policy? The answer is yes they did take place and they are attributable to American foreign policy. But you wouldn't know it.

It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest. The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It's a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis.

I put to you that the United States is without doubt the greatest show on the road. Brutal, indifferent, scornful and ruthless it may be but it is also very clever. As a salesman it is out on its own and its most saleable commodity is self love. It's a winner. Listen to all American presidents on television say the words, 'the American people', as in the sentence, 'I say to the American people it is time to pray and to defend the rights of the American people and I ask the American people to trust their president in the action he is about to take on behalf of the American people.'

It's a scintillating stratagem. Language is actually employed to keep thought at bay. The words 'the American people' provide a truly voluptuous cushion of reassurance. You don't need to think. Just lie back on the cushion. The cushion may be suffocating your intelligence and your critical faculties but it's very comfortable. This does not apply of course to the 40 million people living below the poverty line and the 2 million men and women imprisoned in the vast gulag of prisons, which extends across the US.

The United States no longer bothers about low intensity conflict. It no longer sees any point in being reticent or even devious. It puts its cards on the table without fear or favour. It quite simply doesn't give a damn about the United Nations, international law or critical dissent, which it regards as impotent and irrelevant. It also has its own bleating little lamb tagging behind it on a lead, the pathetic and supine Great Britain.

What has happened to our moral sensibility? Did we ever have any? What do these words mean? Do they refer to a term very rarely employed these days – conscience? A conscience to do not only with our own acts but to do with our shared responsibility in the acts of others? Is all this dead? Look at Guantanamo Bay. Hundreds of people detained without charge for over three years, with no legal representation or due process, technically detained forever. This totally illegitimate structure is maintained in defiance of the Geneva Convention. It is not only tolerated but hardly thought about by what's called the 'international community'. This criminal outrage is being committed by a country, which declares itself to be 'the leader of the free world'. Do we think about the inhabitants of Guantanamo Bay? What does the media say about them? They pop up occasionally – a small item on page six. They have been consigned to a no man's land from which indeed they may never return. At present many are on hunger strike, being force-fed, including British residents. No niceties in these force-feeding procedures. No sedative or anaesthetic. Just a tube stuck up your nose and into your throat. You vomit blood. This is torture. What has the British Foreign Secretary said about this? Nothing. What has the British Prime Minister said about this? Nothing. Why not? Because the United States has said: to criticise our conduct in Guantanamo Bay constitutes an unfriendly act. You're either with us or against us. So Blair shuts up.

The invasion of Iraq was a bandit act, an act of blatant state terrorism, demonstrating absolute contempt for the concept of international law. The invasion was an arbitrary military action inspired by a series of lies upon lies and gross manipulation of the media and therefore of the public; an act intended to consolidate American military and economic control of the Middle East masquerading – as a last resort – all other justifications having failed to justify themselves – as liberation. A formidable assertion of military force responsible for the death and mutilation of thousands and thousands of innocent people.

We have brought torture, cluster bombs, depleted uranium, innumerable acts of random murder, misery, degradation and death to the Iraqi people and call it 'bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East'.

How many people do you have to kill before you qualify to be described as a mass murderer and a war criminal? One hundred thousand? More than enough, I would have thought. Therefore, it is just that Bush and Blair be arraigned before the International Criminal Court of Justice. But Bush has been clever. He has not ratified the International Criminal Court of Justice. Therefore, if any American soldier or for that matter politician finds himself in the dock Bush has warned that he will send in the marines. But Tony Blair has ratified the Court and is therefore available for prosecution. We can let the Court have his address if they're interested. It is Number 10, Downing Street, London.

Death in this context is irrelevant. Both Bush and Blair place death well away on the back burner. At least 100,000 Iraqis were killed by American bombs and missiles before the Iraq insurgency began. These people are of no moment. Their deaths don't exist. They are blank. They are not even recorded as being dead. 'We don't do body counts,' said the American general Tommy Franks.

Early in the invasion there was a photograph published on the front page of British newspapers of Tony Blair kissing the cheek of a little Iraqi boy. 'A grateful child,' said the caption. A few days later there was a story and photograph, on an inside page, of another four-year-old boy with no arms. His family had been blown up by a missile. He was the only survivor. 'When do I get my arms back?' he asked. The story was dropped. Well, Tony Blair wasn't holding him in his arms, nor the body of any other mutilated child, nor the body of any bloody corpse. Blood is dirty. It dirties your shirt and tie when you're making a sincere speech on television.

The 2,000 American dead are an embarrassment. They are transported to their graves in the dark. Funerals are unobtrusive, out of harm's way. The mutilated rot in their beds, some for the rest of their lives. So the dead and the mutilated both rot, in different kinds of graves.

Here is an extract from a poem by Pablo Neruda, 'I'm Explaining a Few Things':

And one morning all that was burning,
one morning the bonfires
leapt out of the earth
devouring human beings
and from then on fire,
gunpowder from then on,
and from then on blood.
Bandits with planes and Moors,
bandits with finger-rings and duchesses,
bandits with black friars spattering blessings
came through the sky to kill children
and the blood of children ran through the streets
without fuss, like children's blood.

Jackals that the jackals would despise
stones that the dry thistle would bite on and spit out,
vipers that the vipers would abominate.

Face to face with you I have seen the blood
of Spain tower like a tide
to drown you in one wave
of pride and knives.

Treacherous
generals:
see my dead house,
look at broken Spain:
from every house burning metal flows

instead of flowers
from every socket of Spain
Spain emerges
and from every dead child a rifle with eyes
and from every crime bullets are born
which will one day find
the bull's eye of your hearts.

And you will ask: why doesn't his poetry
speak of dreams and leaves
and the great volcanoes of his native land.

Come and see the blood in the streets.
Come and see
the blood in the streets.
Come and see the blood
in the streets!*

Let me make it quite clear that in quoting from Neruda's poem I am in no way comparing Republican Spain to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. I quote Neruda because nowhere in contemporary poetry have I read such a powerful visceral description of the bombing of civilians.

I have said earlier that the United States is now totally frank about putting its cards on the table. That is the case. Its official declared policy is now defined as 'full spectrum dominance'. That is not my term, it is theirs. 'Full spectrum dominance' means control of land, sea, air and space and all attendant resources.

The United States now occupies 702 military installations throughout the world in 132 countries, with the honourable exception of Sweden, of course. We don't quite know how they got there but they are there all right.

The United States possesses 8,000 active and operational nuclear warheads. Two thousand are on hair trigger alert, ready to be launched with 15 minutes warning. It is developing new systems of nuclear force, known as bunker busters. The British, ever cooperative, are intending to replace their own nuclear missile, Trident. Who, I wonder, are they aiming at? Osama bin Laden? You? Me? Joe Dokes? China? Paris? Who knows? What we do know is that this infantile insanity – the possession and threatened use of nuclear weapons – is at the heart of present American political philosophy. We must remind ourselves that the United States is on a permanent military footing and shows no sign of relaxing it.

Many thousands, if not millions, of people in the United States itself are demonstrably sickened, shamed and angered by their government's actions, but as things stand they are not a coherent political force – yet. But the anxiety, uncertainty and fear which we can see growing daily in the United States is unlikely to diminish.

I know that President Bush has many extremely competent speech writers but I would like to volunteer for the job myself. I propose the following short address which he can make on television to the nation. I see him grave, hair carefully combed, serious, winning, sincere, often beguiling, sometimes employing a wry smile, curiously attractive, a man's man.

'God is good. God is great. God is good. My God is good. Bin Laden's God is bad. His is a bad God. Saddam's God was bad, except he didn't have one. He was a barbarian. We are not barbarians. We don't chop people's heads off. We believe in freedom. So does God. I am not a barbarian. I am the democratically elected leader of a freedom-loving democracy. We are a compassionate society. We give compassionate electrocution and compassionate lethal injection. We are a great nation. I am not a dictator. He is. I am not a barbarian. He is. And he is. They all are. I possess moral authority. You see this fist? This is my moral authority. And don't you forget it.'

A writer's life is a highly vulnerable, almost naked activity. We don't have to weep about that. The writer makes his choice and is stuck with it. But it is true to say that you are open to all the winds, some of them icy indeed. You are out on your own, out on a limb. You find no shelter, no protection – unless you lie – in which case of course you have constructed your own protection and, it could be argued, become a politician.

I have referred to death quite a few times this evening. I shall now quote a poem of my own called 'Death'.

Where was the dead body found?
Who found the dead body?
Was the dead body dead when found?
How was the dead body found?

Who was the dead body?

Who was the father or daughter or brother
Or uncle or sister or mother or son
Of the dead and abandoned body?

Was the body dead when abandoned?
Was the body abandoned?
By whom had it been abandoned?

Was the dead body naked or dressed for a journey?

What made you declare the dead body dead?
Did you declare the dead body dead?

How well did you know the dead body?
How did you know the dead body was dead?

Did you wash the dead body
Did you close both its eyes
Did you bury the body
Did you leave it abandoned
Did you kiss the dead body

When we look into a mirror we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimetre and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror – for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us.

I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching, unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the *real* truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory.
If such a determination is not embodied in our political vision we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us – the dignity of man.

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* Extract from "I'm Explaining a Few Things" translated by Nathaniel Tarn, from Pablo Neruda: *Selected Poems*, published by Jonathan Cape, London 1970. Used by permission of The Random House Group Limited.

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Interview

Interview, October 2005

Telephone interview with Harold Pinter, after the announcement of the 2005 Nobel Prize in Literature on 13 October 2005. Interviewer is freelance journalist Marika Griehsel.

Interview Transcript

– Hello. Good morning.

– Good morning, good morning, Mr Pinter. Congratulations. I'm calling from the official website of the Nobel Foundation.

– Yes. Well, thank you very much.

– It's fantastic news for us here; and I would like to hear what your thoughts were when you received the news.

– Well, I've … I've been absolutely speechless. I am … I'm overwhelmed by the news, very deeply moved by the news. But I can't really articulate what I feel.

– You didn't have any idea it could come your way, did you?

– No idea whatsoever! No. So I'm just bowled over.

– There's so much to talk about. But I would like just to ask you what, in your career, you think has been the most important, what has the most …

– I cannot answer … I can't answer these questions.

– No, I understand.

– There's nothing more I can say, except that I am deeply moved; and, as I say, I have no words at the moment. I shall have words by the time I get to Stockholm.

– You will be coming to Stockholm?

– Oh, yes.

– Okay. Thank you, Sir.

– Okay?

– Thank you.

– Thank you very much.

– Thank you.

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Bio-Bibliography

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

Biobibliographical Notes

Harold Pinter was born on 10 October 1930 in the London borough of Hackney, son of a Jewish dressmaker. Growing up, Pinter was met with the expressions of anti-Semitism, and has indicated its importance for his becoming a dramatist. At the outbreak of the Second World War, he was evacuated from London at the age of nine, returning when twelve. He has said that the experience of wartime bombing has never lost its hold on him. Back in London, he attended Hackney

Grammar School where he played Macbeth and Romeo among other characters in productions directed by Joseph Brearley. This prompted him to choose a career in acting. In 1948 he was accepted at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. In 1950, he published his first poems. In 1951 he was accepted at the Central School of Speech and Drama. That same year, he won a place in Anew McMaster's famous Irish repertory company, renowned for its performances of Shakespeare. Pinter toured again between 1954 and 1957, using the stage name of David Baron. Between 1956 and 1980 he was married to actor Vivien Merchant. In 1980 he married the author and historian Lady Antonia Fraser.

Pinter made his playwriting debut in 1957 with *The Room*, presented in Bristol. Other early plays were *The Birthday Party* (1957), at first a fiasco of legendary dimensions but later one of his most performed plays, and *The Dumb Waiter* (1957). His conclusive breakthrough came with *The Caretaker* (1959), followed by *The Homecoming* (1964) and other plays.

Harold Pinter is generally seen as the foremost representative of British drama in the second half of the 20th century. That he occupies a position as a modern classic is illustrated by his name entering the language as an adjective used to describe a particular atmosphere and environment in drama: "Pinteresque".

Pinter restored theatre to its basic elements: an enclosed space and unpredictable dialogue, where people are at the mercy of each other and pretence crumbles. With a minimum of plot, drama emerges from the power struggle and hide-and-seek of interlocution. Pinter's drama was first perceived as a variation of absurd theatre, but has later more aptly been characterised as "comedy of menace", a genre where the writer allows us to eavesdrop on the play of domination and submission hidden in the most mundane of conversations. In a typical Pinter play, we meet people defending themselves against intrusion or their own impulses by entrenching themselves in a reduced and controlled existence. Another principal theme is the volatility and elusiveness of the past.

It is said of Harold Pinter that following an initial period of psychological realism he proceeded to a second, more lyrical phase with plays such as *Landscape* (1967) and *Silence* (1968) and finally to a third, political phase with *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), *The New World Order* (1991) and other plays. But this division into periods seems oversimplified and ignores some of his strongest writing, such as *No Man's Land* (1974) and *Ashes to Ashes* (1996). In fact, the continuity in his work is remarkable, and his political themes can be seen as a development of the early Pinter's analysing of threat and injustice.

Since 1973, Pinter has won recognition as a fighter for human rights, alongside his writing. He has often taken stands seen as controversial. Pinter has also written radio plays and screenplays for film and television. Among his best-known screenplays are those for *The Servant* (1963), *The Accident* (1967), *The Go-Between* (1971) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981, based on the John Fowles novel). Pinter has also made a pioneering contribution as a director.
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Characteristics of Harold Pinter's Work

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Characteristics_of_Harold_Pinter%27s_work

Characteristics of Harold Pinter's work identifies distinctive aspects of the works of the British playwright Harold Pinter (1930–2008) and gives an indication of their influence on Anglo-American culture.

Characteristics of Pinter's work

Pinteresque

"That Harold Pinter occupies a position as a modern classic is illustrated by his name entering the language as an adjective used to describe a particular atmosphere and environment in drama: 'Pinteresque' "–placing him in the company of authors considered

unique or influential enough to elicit eponymous adjectives.[2] Susan Harris Smith observes:

The term "Pinteresque" has had an established place in the English language for almost thirty years. The OED defines it as "of or relating to the British playwright, Harold Pinter, or his works"; thus, like a snake swallowing its own tail the definition forms the impenetrable logic of a closed circle and begs the tricky question [sic] of what the word specifically means.

The *Online OED* (2006) defines *Pinteresque* more explicitly: "Resembling or characteristic of his plays. ... Pinter's plays are typically characterized by implications of threat and strong feeling produced through colloquial language, apparent triviality, and long pauses." The Swedish Academy defines characteristics of the *Pinteresque* in greater detail:

Pinter restored theatre to its basic elements: an enclosed space and unpredictable dialogue, where people are at the mercy of each other and pretence crumbles. With a minimum of plot, drama emerges from the power struggle and hide-and-seek of interlocution. Pinter's drama was first perceived as a variation of absurd theatre, but has later more aptly been characterised as 'comedy of menace', a genre where the writer allows us to eavesdrop on the play of domination and submission hidden in the most mundane of conversations. In a typical Pinter play, we meet people defending themselves against intrusion or their own impulses by entrenching themselves in a reduced and controlled existence. Another principal theme is the volatility and elusiveness of the past.

Over the years Pinter himself has "always been very dismissive when people have talked about languages and silences and situations as being 'Pinteresque'," observes Kirsty Wark in their interview on *Newsnight Review* broadcast on 23 June 2006; she wonders, "Will you finally acknowledge there is such a thing as a 'Pinteresque' moment?" "No," Pinter replies, "I've no idea what it means. Never have. I really don't.... I can detect where a thing is 'Kafkaesque' or 'Chekhovian' [Wark's examples]," but with respect to the "Pinteresque", he says, "I can't define what it is myself. You use the term 'menace' and so on. I have no explanation of any of that really. What I write is what I write."

Comedy of menace

Once asked what his plays are about, Pinter lobbed back a phrase "the weasel under the cocktail cabinet", which he regrets has been taken seriously and applied in popular criticism:

Once many years ago, I found myself engaged uneasily in a public discussion on theatre. Someone asked me what was my work 'about'. I replied with no thought at all and merely to frustrate this line of enquiry: 'the weasel under the cocktail cabinet'. This was a great mistake. Over the years I have seen that remark quoted in a number of learned columns. It has now seemingly acquired a profound significance, and is seen to be a highly relevant and meaningful observation about my own work. But for me the remark meant precisely nothing.

Despite Pinter's protestations to the contrary, many reviewers and other critics consider the remark, though facetious, an apt description of his plays. For although Pinter repudiated it, it does contain an important clue about his relationship to English dramatic tradition (Sofer 29); "Mr. Pinter ... is celebrated for what the critic Irving Wardle has called 'the comedy of menace' " (Brantley, "Harold Pinter"; cf. "A Master of Menace" [multimedia presentation]).

In December 1971, in his interview with Pinter about *Old Times*, Mel Gussow recalled that "After *The Homecoming* [Pinter] said that [he] 'couldn't any longer stay in the room with this bunch of people who opened doors and came in and went out. *Landscape* and *Silence* [the two short poetic memory plays that were written between *The Homecoming* and *Old Times*] are in a very different form. There isn't any menace at all.' " Later, when he asked Pinter to expand on his view that he had "tired" of "menace", Pinter added: "when I said that I was tired of menace, I was using a word that I didn't coin. I never thought of menace myself. It was called 'comedy of menace' quite a long time ago. I never stuck categories on myself, or on any of us [playwrights]. But if what I understand the word menace to mean is certain elements that I have employed in the past in the shape of a particular play, then I don't think it's worthy of much more exploration."

Two silences

The "Pinter Silence"

Among the most-commonly cited of Pinter's comments on his own work are his remarks about two kinds of silence ("two silences"), including his objections to "that tired, grimy phrase 'failure of communication'," as defined in his speech to the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol in 1962, incorporated in his published version of the speech entitled "Writing for the Theatre":

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.

We have heard many times that tired, grimy phrase: 'failure of communication' ... and this phrase has been fixed to my work quite consistently. I believe the contrary. I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility.

I am not suggesting that no character in a play can never say what he in fact means. Not at all. I have found that there invariably does come a moment when this happens, when he says something, perhaps, which he has never said before. And where this happens, what he says is irrevocable, and can never be taken back.

In his "Presentation Speech" of the 2005 Nobel Prize in Literature to Harold Pinter, in absentia, Swedish writer Per Wästberg, Member of the Swedish Academy and Chairman of its Nobel Committee, observes: "The abyss under chat, the unwillingness to communicate other than superficially, the need to rule and mislead, the suffocating sensation of accidents bubbling under the quotidian, the nervous perception that a dangerous story has been censored – all this vibrates through Pinter's drama."

The "Pinter Pause"

One of the "two silences"–when Pinter's stage directions indicate *pause* and *silence* when his characters are not speaking at all–has become a "trademark" of Pinter's dialogue called the "Pinter pause": "During the 1960s, Pinter became famous–nay, notorious–for his trademark: 'The Pinter pause' " (Filichia). Actors and directors often find Pinter's

"pauses and silences" to be daunting elements of performing his plays, leading to much discussion of them in theatrical and dramatic criticism, and actors who have worked with Pinter in rehearsals have "reported that he regretted ever starting to write 'Pause' as a stage direction, because it often leads to portentous overacting" (Jacobson). Speaking about their experiences of working with Pinter in rehearsing director Carey Perloff's 1989 double bill of *The Birthday Party* and *Mountain Language* (for Classic Stage Company), American actors David Strathairn and Peter Riegert agreed with Jean Stapleton that "Pinter's comments ... 'freed' the cast from feeling reverential about his pauses," and, while Strathairn "believes pauses can be overdone," he also "thinks Pinter's are distinctive: 'The natural ones always seem to be right where he wrote them. His pause or beat comes naturally in the rhythm of the conversation. [As an actor, you] find yourself pausing in mid-sentence, thinking about what you just said or are going to say....' " Perloff said: "He didn't want them weighted that much. ... He kept laughing that everybody made such a big deal about it.' He wanted them honored, she said, but not as 'these long, heavy, psychological pauses, where people look at each other filled with pregnant meaning' " (Jacobson).

More recently, in an article elliptically headlined "Cut the Pauses ... Says Pinter", a London *Sunday Times* television program announcement for Harry Burton's documentary film *Working With Pinter*, Olivia Cole observes that he "made brooding silence into an art form, but after 50 years Harold Pinter has said directors should be free to cut his trademark pauses if they want...." In *Working With Pinter* (shown on British television's *More 4* in February 2007), Cole writes, Pinter "says he has been misunderstood. He maintains that while others detected disturbing undertones, he merely intended basic stage directions" in writing "*pause*" and "*silence*". She quotes Pinter's remarks from *Working With Pinter*:

These damn silences and pauses are all to do with what's going on ... and if they don't make any sense, then I always say cut them. I think they've been taken much too far these silences and pauses in my plays. I've really been extremely depressed when I've seen productions in which a silence happens because it says silence or a pause happens because it says pause. And it's totally artificial and meaningless.

When I myself act in my own plays, which I have occasionally, I've cut half of them, actually.

Exemplifying the frequency and relative duration of pauses in Pinter's plays, Cole observes that "Pinter wrote 140 pauses into his work Betrayal, 149 into The Caretaker and 224 into The Homecoming. The longest are typically 10 seconds."

Pinter's having encouraged actors to "cut" his pauses and silences–with the important qualification "if they don't make any sense" (elided in Cole's headline)–has "bemused directors", according to Cole, who quotes Pinter's longtime friend and director Sir Peter Hall as saying "that it would be a 'failure' for a director or actor to ignore the pauses":

A pause in Pinter is as important as a line. They are all there for a reason. Three dots is a hesitation, a pause is a fairly mundane crisis and a silence is some sort of crisis.

Beckett started it and Harold took it over to express that which is inexpressible in a very original and particular way, and made them something which is his....

Cole concludes that Hall added, however, that, in *Working With Pinter*, Pinter "was right to criticise productions in which actors were fetishising their pauses".

Quoting J. Barry Lewis, the director of a recent production of *Betrayal*, by Palm Beach Dramaworks, Lisa Cohen observes that Pinter has "even entered popular culture with what is called 'the Pinter pause,' a term that describes ... those silent moments 'filled with unspoken dialogue' that occur throughout his plays."

Some examples of Pinter's influence on Anglo-American popular culture

Allusions to "the Pinteresque" and to specific characteristics of Pinter's works and, more recently, to his politics pervade Anglo-American popular culture (*OED*; Susan Harris Smith; mass media accounts, as cited above). The Modern Language Association annual convention has already hosted two linked programs on "Pinter's Influence and Influences" and hosted another one relating to this subject in 2007 (Merritt, "Harold Pinter Bibliography: 2000–2002"; "Pinter Society Events", Harold Pinter Society website).

Exemplifying Pinter's cultural influence for several decades, a line in "The Ladies Who Lunch", a song in *Company*, the 1970 Broadway musical by George Furth and Stephen Sondheim, alludes to Manhattanite "ladies who lunch" taking in "a Pinter play", "fashionable" at that time (Merritt, *Pinter in Play* 217). Yet Pinter told John Barber ten years later, in 1980: "'This really is an awful business, this fashion. I must tell you I feel I've been unfashionable all my life. I was oldfashioned from the very beginning, and I'm unfashionable now, really.' "

Episode 164 of the very popular American television series *Seinfeld*, entitled "The Betrayal" (originally broadcast 27 November 1997), is structured in reverse somewhat like Pinter's play and film *Betrayal*. Jerry Seinfeld's comic parodic homage to Harold Pinter, the episode features a character named "Pinter". Since the first airing of that *Seinfeld* episode and since the subsequent release of films like *Memento* and other popular works with reversed chronological structures, some media accounts (such as that in the IMDb) refer to Pinter's plot device in his play and film as a mere "gimmick". But scholars and other critical reviewers consider the reversed structure a fully integrated ingenious stylistic means of heightening multiple kinds of ironies energising *Betrayal*'s comedic wit, its cumulative poignancy, and its ultimate emotional impact on audiences, and the play has been produced throughout the United States, Britain, and parts of the rest of the world with increasing frequency.

A character in the fourth episode of the second season of *Dawson's Creek*, "Tamara's Return" (28 Oct 1998), alludes to Pinter's so-called "sub-textual" use of silence as "a classic 'Pinter' moment". In dialogue between lead character Pacey Witter (played by Joshua Jackson) and Tamara Jacobs (Leann Hunley), his former English teacher with whom Pacey has had an affair, Tamara tells Pacey that an awkward moment of silence between them is "what we ex-English teachers call a classic 'Pinter' moment, where everything is said in silence because the emotion behind what we really want to say is just too overwhelming. ... silence is an acquired taste. The more complicated life becomes the better it is to learn to say nothing." When Pacey inquires "Who is this Pinter guy?" Tamara urges him, "Stay in school." Later Pacey tells Tamara that he has "looked up this Pinter guy. Harold, playwright, the king of subtext. You say one thing, but you mean another," wondering further: "Do you think it's possible for us to have a moment without all the subtext?" "Uh, I don't know, Pacey," Tamara replies. "Words have always gotten us into so much trouble." Pacey and Tamara finally agree that "This Pinter guy was really onto something."

Further alluding to Pinter's renowned "pauses and silences", the song "Up Against It", from the album *Bilingual*, by the English electronic music/pop music duo Pet Shop Boys,

includes the lines: "Such a cold winter/With scenes as slow as Pinter" (Tennant and Lowe).

Also illustrating the frequent allusions to Pinter's "silences" in commentaries about others' work, in a book review of Nick Hornby's "debut teenage novel" *Slam* (Penguin Books), Janet Christie observes hyperbolically that Hornby is "spot-on with the way a conversation with a teenage boy contains more meaningful silences than Harold Pinter's entire oeuvre ...."

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In Memoriam: Harold Pinter

{https://www.gold.ac.uk/pinter-centre/in-memoriam-harold-pinter/}

Virtually unique in his capacity to create avant-garde masterpieces that have been highly successful in commercial productions, Pinter's influence on postwar British playwrights remains unrivalled.

The death of Harold Pinter on 24 December 2008 after a long battle with throat cancer is an incalculable loss to the worlds of literature and theatre, as well as to the political arena in which he had for two decades been both admired for his honesty and courage and ridiculed for the intensity of his passion. The Centre was privileged by Harold Pinter's presence as guest of honour at its formal inauguration in 2003. The kindness spoken of by those who know him personally was very much in evidence on that occasion as was his courage in making an impromptu speech in which he spoke with grace, wit and remarkable honesty about his gratitude at being spared for the occasion.

Having been awarded an honorary doctorate by Goldsmiths in 2001, he visited the College on a number of occasions, always tempering his passionate commitment to political causes with generosity and good humour towards the students with whom he came into contact. Pinter's last visit to Goldsmiths was in February 2005, when he was in conversation with Blake Morrison, reading from his work and answering questions from a packed hall of students and staff. His death prompted obituaries that were predictable not only in their celebration of his originality and significance as the most important postwar British dramatist, but in some cases in their simplistic denigration of his later plays as moralistic political propaganda. Among genuine scholars of his work, however, his late play *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) quickly established its reputation as a masterpiece, the simplicity of whose theatrical structure is in inverse proportion to its linguistic complexity. From *The Room* (1957) to *Press Conference* (2005) Pinter was continuously innovative in his use of theatrical form, while his work remained remarkably consistent in its ethical and epistemological concerns.

Whether, as in the eighties and nineties, concerned with the state abuse of power, or with the micro-politics of human relations that form the key motif in his work until 1982, the majority of Pinter's plays anatomise both the brute reality and the language of power, so that there is no real contradiction between his early - apparently apolitical – drama and the more explicit politics of the later work. The interweaving of popular cultural forms such as forties film noir and stage thrillers with the modernist motifs that reflect Pinter's admiration of Kafka and Beckett, produces a suspenseful drama of interrogation, evasion and silence that exposes a crisis of subjectivity at the core of human identity.

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Press Release

SVENSKA
AKADEMIEN

The Permanent Secretary
Press release
13 October 2005

The Nobel Prize in Literature 2005
Harold Pinter

The Nobel Prize in Literature for 2005 is awarded to the English writer Harold Pinter

"who in his plays uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into oppression's closed rooms".

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Honours, Awards, and Prizes

- Best Play award for *The Caretaker* in the *Evening Standard* Theatre Awards, 1960
- Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE), 1966
- Best Play award for The Homecoming in the 1967 Tony Awards
- Shakespeare Prize (Hamburg), 1970
- European Prize for Literature (Vienna), 1973
- Pirandello Prize (Palermo), 1980
- Giles Cooper Award, 1981
- Order of Merit (Chile), 1992
- America Award, 1995
- The David Cohen Prize for Literature, 1995
- Honorary fellow of Queen Mary, University of London
- Laurence Olivier Special Award, 1996
- Molière d'honneur, Paris, in recognition of his life's work, 1997
- *The Sunday Times* Award for Literary Excellence, 1997
- BAFTA Fellowship, 1997
- Companion of Literature, Royal Society of Literature, 1998
- The Critics' Circle Award for Distinguished Service to the Arts, 2000
- Brianza Poetry Prize (Italy), 2000
- *The South Bank Show* Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Arts, 2001
- S.T. Dupont Golden PEN Award, 2001 for a Lifetime's Distinguished Service to Literature
- "Premio Fiesole ai Maestri del Cinema", Italy, 2001
- World Leaders Award (World Leaders: A Festival of Creative Genius, Toronto), 2001

- Hermann Kesten Prize for outstanding commitment on behalf of persecuted and imprisoned writers, awarded by German PEN (Berlin), 2001
- Member of the Order of the Companions of Honour (CH) for services to Literature, 2002
- Diploma *ad Honorem*, Teatro Filodrammatici (Milan), 2004
- *The Evening Standard* Theatre Awards, 50th Anniversary – Special Award, 2004
- Wilfred Owen Poetry Prize, 2005
- Franz Kafka Prize, 2005
- Nobel Prize in Literature, 2005
- Europe Theatre Prize, 2006
- Serbian Foundation Prize, 2006
- St. George Plaque of the City of Kragujevac, 2006
- Legion d'honneur, France, 2007
- Blue plaque on his old home in Worthing, 2009

Honorary Degrees

- University of Reading, 1970
- University of Birmingham, 1971
- University of Glasgow, 1974
- University of East Anglia, 1974
- University of Stirling, 1979
- Brown University, 1982
- University of Hull, 1986
- University of Sussex, 1990
- University of East London, 1994
- University of Sofia, 1995
- University of Bristol, 1998
- Goldsmiths, University of London, 1999
- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2000
- University of Florence, 2001
- University of Turin, 2002
- National University of Ireland, 2004
- University of Leeds, 2007
- University of Kragujevac, 2008
- University of Cambridge, 2008
- Central School of Speech and Drama, 2008

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Videos

01] Harold Pinter: Writer, Actor and Activist (Full Documentary)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcadhfP7FO8 [50:21]

Harold Pinter, the writer, actor and activist. A personal take on working with Harold Pinter from intimate conversations with actors, directors and writers on their experiences of the man and his work. The documentary is interwoven with clips from plays and films, archive interviews with theatre luminaries and newsreel footage. Featuring interviews with - Sir Michael Caine, James Fox and more.

02] Harold Pinter talks to Harry Burton @ the British Library about his life & times (Sept 8th 2008).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fQ8_zJP6Zw [47:13]

Harold Pinter interviewed by Harry Burton in September 2008, in one of the Nobel Laureate's last public appearances. Introduced by Jamie Andrews, Head of Culture & Learning at the British Library, where the interview took place as part of the Golden Generation season.

03] Harold Pinter interview (2001)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVchqMXobVQ [38:10]

04]Pinter's Progress

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVqleJ0VJNs [51:13]

A personal take on working with Harold Pinter from intimate conversations with actors, directors and writers on their experiences of the man and his work. Triple Bafta winner, Philip Saville, worked with Pinter in 1960 directing his first television play, 'A Night Out' for Armchair Theatre and as an actor in Sartre's 'In Camera' (Huis Clos) for the BBC. The documentary is interwoven with clips from plays and films, archive interviews with theatre luminaries and newsreel footage.

05] CELEBRATION by Harold PINTER (2007)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LrqTkp0iVs [40:24]

"Harold Pinter's play about a celebratory dinner at a top restaurant in town. Two couples meet for dinner to celebrate the wedding anniversary of one of the couples. Also joining into the conversation are various members of the staff and a couple from another table" (IMDB)

06] Harold Pinter Life and Works || AKSRajveer || Literature Lovers

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1reWMJRQ8Dg [1:03:22]

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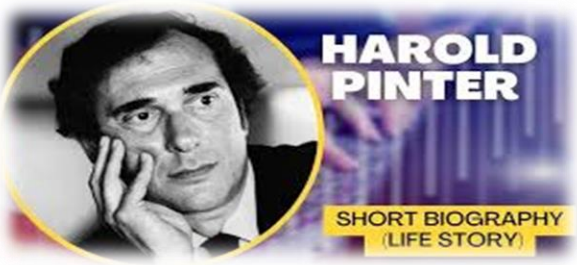

22 Oct 1919

17 Nov 2013

Doris Lessing

Nobel Prize in Literature 2007

Born: 22 October 1919, Kermanshah, Persia (now Iran)
Died: 17 November 2013, London, United Kingdom
Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom

Prize motivation:

"that epicist of the female experience, who with skepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilization to scrutiny"

Language: English
Prize share: 1/1
{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/facts/}

Links to other sites

[01] On Doris Lessing from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] On Doris Lessing from BBC
[03] Doris Lessing: A Retrospective from dorislessing.org
[04] Doris Lessing Society
[05] https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/other-resources/ [Her Reaction : Video >> 0:2:24]

Nobel diploma

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN
har vid sin sammankomst den
11 oktober 2007 i överensstämmelse
med föreskrifterna i det av
Alfred Nobel
den 27 november 1895 upprättade
testamentet beslutat att 2007 års
Nobelpris i litteratur skall tilldelas
Doris Lessing
"den kvinnliga erfarenhetens
epiker, som med skepsis, hetta och
visionär kraft har tagit en splittrad civilisation till granskning"
STOCKHOLM DEN 10 DECEMBER 2007

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Photo Gallery

Kindly visit the Web Page to view the Photos

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/photo-gallery/

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Documentary

Doris Lessing Receives her Nobel Prize

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/documentary/

Doris Lessing received her 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature at a ceremony in the main gallery of The Wallace Collection in London on 30 January 2008. Swedish ambassador Staffan Carlsson presented Lessing with her Nobel Prize medal and diploma. Victoria Barnsley, head of Lessing's British publisher HarperCollins UK, introduced the ceremony.

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Prize Announcement

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/prize-announcement/

Announcement of the 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature to Doris Lessing, presented by Professor Horace Engdahl, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, on 11 October 2007.

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Prize Presentation

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/prize-presentation/

Watch the 2007 Nobel Laureate in Literature, Doris Lessing, receive her Nobel Prize during a ceremony in the main gallery of The Wallace Collection in London, England, on 30 January 2008. Swedish ambassador Staffan Carlsson presented Lessing with her Nobel Prize medal and diploma.

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AWARD CEREMONY SPEECH

Presentation Speech by Per Wästberg, Writer, Member of the Swedish Academy, Chairman of the Nobel Committee for Literature, 10 December 2007.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Esteemed Nobel Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Doris Lessing is part of both the history of literature and living literature. She has contributed to changing the way we see the world. In all probability, no other Laureates has accumulated such a volume of work. We stroll through the great library of her work, where all sections are unmarked and all genre classification pointless. There is life and movement behind the broad or narrow spines of the books, resisting categorisation and the imposition of order.

Lessing links to the great narrative tradition of the 19th century but equally we may use her works as textbooks in 20th-century behavioural patterns, not least to discover the way many thought – or thought wrongly – during one of history's most turbulent periods as war succeeded war, colonialism was unmasked and communism in Europe conquered.

She has revealed the totalitarian temptations and shown us the strength of undogmatic humanism. She has displayed an almost limitless empathy with odd lives and a freedom from prejudice regarding every form of human behaviour. She was early in flagging global environmental threats and poverty and corruption in the Third World. She has given voice to the silent and to the refugees and homeless of our century – from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. And as few others have done, she personified the woman's role in the 20th century.

She makes us exclaim: "How could she know?" since she was often first to speak about what no one else did. For her, nothing was too unimportant or insignificant. Which is why she batters at our hearts. But although she resembles a continent that initially defies exploration, she has never subscribed to the idea that the world is too complicated for clarification.

Undeterred, she peers under mossy stones and mouldy linoleum flooring, shying from nothing, and therefore becoming help and support for innumerable people. Like Frances in *The Sweetest Dream*, she takes care of everyone, a hospitable earth mother – later compiling perspicacious case studies of her visitors.
Doris Lessing writes as she breathes – to approach closer the trials and revelations of our existence. Eschewing protective gloves, she grasps our reality like a grubby root vegetable, uncovering experiences we did not realise we could access. Via thousands of intimate details and in lower-case letters – dare we call them feminine? – she phrases the eternal questions of how and why we live.

Her autobiographical novels were succeeded by memoirs from Rhodesia and London: *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade*. They vibrate with sensuous life and manage unusually sharp focus in a telescopic rearview mirror, pitilessly probing social critique and a fearless ability to look inward. Lessing struggles with her parents, especially her mother, up to an advanced age, providing us with merciless images of motherhood. From the beginning, ideas, movements and feelings were swirling through the girl, making her a relentless witness of her time, and an authority-antagonist for whom the emperor is always naked.

Walking in the Shade ends in 1962 when *The Golden Notebook* became an epiphany for an entire generation of women. In this, Lessing's most experimental novel, battle is joined between the will to create and the desire to love. Obstacles are mapped for a woman seeking both independence and intimacy, since her freedom is paradoxically incomplete without the love that in turn undermines it. Lessing shows how conventions and other pitfalls along the way impede sensitive and passionate women from living authentically and fully, from glimpsing into the fifth, golden notebook.
Emotions blind and lead astray Lessing's heroines and endanger their free will. *Children of Violence* is the collective name for the five books about Martha Quest, Lessing's alter ego, who, in moving from a colonial existence to the British class hierarchy, is swept away by her dreams and primary instincts.

Chiefly female readers identified with Martha Quest's longing for freedom and disgust at hypocrisy and mendacity. A poor person in a rich society, a woman among men, a white among blacks, Doris Lessing worked to become the independent intellectual she was. She unveils the temptation of devotion to a utopia and

absorption in a collective, and she illustrates how a triumphant ideology can deceive us with false redemption. She became a cartographer of disillusionment, drawing dystopias and catastrophes with frightening clarity.

Lessing has the ability to freely move into and away from herself, to barge in and become an invisible lodger. She often begins by observing her characters from within and then moving outside them, to strip them of their illusions from an objective distance. We can follow this eerie process in *The Summer before the Dark*; in the allegorical psycho-thriller about a monster child, *The Fifth Child*; and in *The Good Terrorist*, an in-depth account of the extreme leftwing squatting culture that sponges off female self-sacrifice.

In her later works, Lessing demolishes a long list of basic values. Left are the networks of family and friends, cats of course, and the foremothers and midwives in every sense who take responsibility, and always too much responsibility. And in this year's novel, *The Cleft*, she accords us a parable from the dawn of mankind – before the invention of love. Which is where she seems happiest, among hunters and gatherers, far from a contemporary culture that presages disorder and collapse.

Doris Lessing's epic landscapes shift from honest realism to symbolic fable, from the psychology of self-realisation to saga and myth. Using the lens of intuition, she has charted the changes from the decline of the empire through to a future earth ravaged by atomic warfare. Mara and Dann in the eco-fable of the same name flee from a new Ice Age to an uncertain foothold in what used to be Africa. In her massive *Canopus in Argos* suite she lets observers from another solar system report on our civilisation's ultimate phase. She moves freely across the plains of fantasy without raising her voice; she declines the rhetoric of doomsday preachers.

Ever since her African debut in 1950 with the tragic novel *The Grass Is Singing*, Lessing has disregarded boundaries: moral, gender or of habit. Solitude and social ostracism remain her thematic glue.

But when she occasionally draws a parallel between love and politics, it is because both stand for the hope we must try to sustain if living is to be worthwhile.

Dear Doris Lessing,

Age is no issue in literature. You are forever young and wise, old and rebellious. You are the least ingratiating of novelists. Your bout with destiny and reality is heavyweight-class; nothing has induced you to leave the ring. Throughout the world over the last 58 years, people have been warmed, provoked and led hand-in-hand by your books. You have helped us cope with some of our time's important concerns and you have created a document for the future to carry forward the flavour of an age, its prejudices and survival strategies, its everyday trifles and delights.

Your lifework and your great pioneering effort are today not fulfilled but crowned with a prize you have long deserved. The Swedish Academy sends you its warmest congratulations.

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The Nobel Prize
Award Ceremony 2007

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/award-video/

[1:29:07]

Watch the 2007 Nobel Laureates in Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine and Literature receive the Nobel medals and diplomas, and the Economics Laureates the Economics Prize medals and diplomas during the Award Ceremony at the Stockholm Concert Hall in Sweden on 10 December 2007.

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Nobel Prize Lecture

On not winning the Nobel Prize

The Nobel Lecture in Literature was delivered on Friday 7 December at the Swedish Academy, Stockholm, by Nicholas Pearson, Doris Lessing's publisher in the UK. He was introduced by Horace Engdahl, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy.

December 7, 2007

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/lecture/

On not Winning the Nobel Prize

I am standing in a doorway looking through clouds of blowing dust to where I am told there is still uncut forest. Yesterday I drove through miles of stumps, and charred remains of fires where, in '56, there was the most wonderful forest I have ever seen, all now destroyed. People have to eat. They have to get fuel for fires.

This is north-west Zimbabwe in the early eighties, and I am visiting a friend who was a teacher in a school in London. He is here "to help Africa," as we put it. He is a gently idealistic soul and what he found in this school shocked him into a depression, from which it was hard to recover. This school is like every other built after Independence. It consists of four large brick rooms side by side, put straight into the dust, one two three four, with a half room at one end, which is the library. In these classrooms are blackboards, but my friend keeps the chalks in his pocket, as otherwise they would be stolen. There is no atlas or globe in the school, no textbooks, no exercise books, or biros. In the library there are no books of the kind the pupils would like to read, but only tomes from American universities, hard even to lift, rejects from white libraries, or novels with titles like *Weekend in Paris* and *Felicity Finds Love.*

There is a goat trying to find sustenance in some aged grass. The headmaster has embezzled the school funds and is suspended, arousing the question familiar to all of us but usually in more august contexts: How is it these people behave like this when they must know everyone is watching them?

My friend doesn't have any money because everyone, pupils and teachers, borrow from him when he is paid and will probably never pay him back. The pupils range from six to twenty-six, because some who did not get schooling as children are here to make it up. Some pupils walk many miles every morning, rain or shine and across rivers. They cannot do homework because there is no electricity in the villages, and you can't study easily by the light of a burning log. The girls have to fetch water and cook before they set off for school and when they get back.

As I sit with my friend in his room, people drop in shyly, and everyone begs for books. "Please send us books when you get back to London," one man says. "They taught us to read but we have no books." Everybody I met, everyone, begged for books.

I was there some days. The dust blew. The pumps had broken and the women were having to fetch water from the river. Another idealistic teacher from England was rather ill after seeing what this "school" was like.

On the last day they slaughtered the goat. They cut it into bits and cooked it in a great tin. This was the much anticipated end-of-term feast: boiled goat and porridge. I drove away while it was still going on, back through the charred remains and stumps of the forest.

I do not think many of the pupils of this school will get prizes.

The next day I am to give a talk at a school in North London, a very good school, whose name we all know. It is a school for boys, with beautiful buildings and gardens.

These children here have a visit from some well known person every week, and it is in the nature of things that these may be fathers, relatives, even mothers of the pupils. A visit from a celebrity is not unusual for them.

As I talk to them, the school in the blowing dust of north-west Zimbabwe is in my mind, and I look at the mildly expectant English faces in front of me and try to tell them about what I have seen in the last week. Classrooms without books, without textbooks, or an atlas, or even a map pinned to a wall. A school where the teachers beg to be sent books to tell them how to teach, they being only eighteen or nineteen themselves. I tell these English boys how everybody begs for books: "Please send us books." I am sure that anyone who has ever given a speech will know that moment when the faces you are looking at are blank. Your listeners cannot hear what you are saying, there are no images in their minds to match what you are telling them – in this case the story of a school standing in dust clouds, where water is short, and where the end of term treat is a just-killed goat cooked in a great pot.

Is it really so impossible for these privileged students to imagine such bare poverty?

I do my best. They are polite.

I'm sure that some of them will one day win prizes.

Then, the talk is over. Afterwards I ask the teachers how the library is, and if the pupils read. In this privileged school, I hear what I always hear when I go to such schools and even universities.

"You know how it is," one of the teacher's says. "A lot of the boys have never read at all, and the library is only half used."

Yes, indeed we do know how it is. All of us.

We are in a fragmenting culture, where our certainties of even a few decades ago are questioned and where it is common for young men and women, who have had years of education, to know nothing of the world, to have read nothing, knowing only some speciality or other, for instance, computers.

What has happened to us is an amazing invention — computers and the internet and TV. It is a revolution. This is not the first revolution the human race has dealt with. The printing revolution, which did not take place in a matter of a few decades, but took much longer, transformed our minds and ways of thinking. A foolhardy lot, we accepted it all, as we always do, never asked, What is going to happen to us now, with this invention of print? In the same way, we never thought to ask, How will our lives, our way of thinking, be changed by this internet, which has seduced a whole generation with its inanities so that even quite reasonable people will confess that once they are hooked, it is hard to cut free, and they may find a whole day has passed in blogging etc.

Very recently, anyone even mildly educated would respect learning, education, and our great store of literature. Of course, we all know that when this happy state was with us, people would pretend to read, would pretend respect for learning. But it is on record that working men and women longed for books, and this is evidenced by the founding of working men's libraries and institutes, the colleges of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Reading, books, used to be part of a general education.

Older people, talking to young ones, must understand just how much of an education reading was, because the young ones know so much less. And if children cannot read, it is because they have not read.

We all know this sad story.

But we do not know the end of it.

We think of the old adage, "Reading maketh a full man" – and forgetting about jokes to do with over-eating – reading makes a woman and a man full of information, of history, of all kinds of knowledge.

But we in the West are not the only people in the world. Not long ago a friend who had been in Zimbabwe told me about a village where people had not eaten for three days, but they were still talking about books and how to get them, about education.

I belong to an organisation which started out with the intention of getting books into the villages. There was a group of people who in another connection had travelled Zimbabwe at its grass roots. They told me that the villages, unlike what is reported, are full of intelligent people, teachers retired, teachers on leave, children on holidays, old people. I myself paid for a little survey to discover what people in Zimbabwe want to read, and found the results were the same as those of a Swedish survey I had not known about. People want to read the same kinds of books that we in Europe want to read – novels of all kinds, science fiction,

poetry, detective stories, plays, and do-it-yourself books, like how to open a bank account. All of Shakespeare too. A problem with finding books for villagers is that they don't know what is available, so a set book, like the *Mayor ofCasterbridge,* becomes popular simply because it just happens to be there. *Animal Farm,* for obvious reasons, is the most popular of all novels.

Our organisation was helped from the very start by Norway, and then by Sweden. Without this kind of support our supplies of books would have dried up. We got books from wherever we could. Remember, a good paperback from England costs a month's wages in Zimbabwe: that was *before* Mugabe's reign of terror. Now with inflation, it would cost several years' wages. But having taken a box of books out to a village – and remember there is a terrible shortage of petrol – I can tell you that the box was greeted with tears. The library may be a plank on bricks under a tree. And within a week there will be literacy classes – people who can read teaching those who can't, citizenship classes – and in one remote village, since there were no novels written in the language Tonga, a couple of lads sat down to write novels in Tonga. There are six or so main languages in Zimbabwe and there are novels in all of them: violent, incestuous, full of crime and murder.

It is said that a people gets the government it deserves, but I do not think it is true of Zimbabwe. And we must remember that this respect and hunger for books comes, not from Mugabe's regime, but from the one before it, the whites. It is an astonishing phenomenon, this hunger for books, and it can be seen everywhere from Kenya down to the Cape of Good Hope.

This links improbably with a fact: I was brought up in what was virtually a mud hut, thatched. This kind of house has been built always, everywhere there are reeds or grass, suitable mud, poles for walls. Saxon England for example. The one I was brought up in had four rooms, one beside another, and it was full of books. Not only did my parents take books from England to Africa, but my mother ordered books by post from England for her children. Books arrived in great brown paper parcels, and they were the joy of my young life. A mud hut, but full of books.

Even today I get letters from people living in a village that might not have electricity or running water, just like our family in our elongated mud hut. "I shall be a writer too," they say, "because I've the same kind of house you lived in."

But here is the difficulty, no?

Writing, writers, do not come out of houses without books.

There is the gap. There is the difficulty.

I have been looking at the speeches by some of your recent prizewinners. Take the magnificent Pamuk. He said his father had 500 books. His talent did not come out of the air, he was connected with the great tradition. Take V.S. Naipaul. He mentions that the Indian Vedas were close behind the memory of his family. His father encouraged him to write, and when he got to England he would visit the British Library. So he was close to the great tradition.

Let us take John Coetzee. He was not only close to the great tradition, he was the tradition: he taught literature in Cape Town. And how sorry I am that I was never in one of his classes, taught by that wonderfully brave, bold mind.

In order to write, in order to make literature, there must be a close connection with libraries, books, with the Tradition.

I have a friend from Zimbabwe, a Black writer. He taught himself to read from the labels on jam jars, the labels on preserved fruit cans. He was brought up in an area I have driven through, an area for rural blacks. The earth is grit and gravel, there are low sparse bushes. The huts are poor, nothing like the well cared-for huts of the better off. A school – but like one I have described. He found a discarded children's encyclopaedia on a rubbish heap and taught himself from that.

On Independence in 1980 there was a group of good writers in Zimbabwe, truly a nest of singing birds. They were bred in old Southern Rhodesia, under the whites – the mission schools, the better schools. Writers are not made in Zimbabwe. Not easily, not under Mugabe.

All the writers travelled a difficult road to literacy, let alone to becoming writers. I would say learning to read from the printed labels on jam jars and discarded encyclopaedias was not uncommon. And we are talking about people hungering for standards of education beyond them, living in huts with many children – an overworked mother, a fight for food and clothing.

Yet despite these difficulties, writers came into being. And we should also remember that this was Zimbabwe, conquered less than a hundred years before. The grandparents of these people might have been storytellers working in the oral tradition. In one or two generations there was the transition from stories remembered and passed on, to print, to books. What an achievement.

Books, literally wrested from rubbish heaps and the detritus of the white man's world. But a sheaf of paper is one thing, a published book quite another. I have had several accounts sent to me of the publishing scene in Africa. Even in more privileged places like North Africa, with its different tradition, to talk of a publishing scene is a dream of possibilities.

Here I am talking about books never written, writers that could not make it because the publishers are not there. Voices unheard. It is not possible to estimate this great waste of talent, of potential. But even before that stage of a book's creation which demands a publisher, an advance, encouragement, there is something else lacking.

Writers are often asked, How do you write? With a wordprocessor? an electric typewriter? a quill? longhand? But the essential question is, "Have you found a space, that empty space, which should surround you when you write?" Into that space, which is like a form of listening, of attention, will come the words, the words your characters will speak, ideas – inspiration.

If a writer cannot find this space, then poems and stories may be stillborn.

When writers talk to each other, what they discuss is always to do with this imaginative space, this other time. "Have you found it? Are you holding it fast?"

Let us now jump to an apparently very different scene. We are in London, one of the big cities. There is a new writer. We cynically enquire, Is she good-looking? If this is a man, charismatic? Handsome? We joke but it is not a joke.

This new find is acclaimed, possibly given a lot of money. The buzzing of paparazzi begins in their poor ears. They are feted, lauded, whisked about the world. Us old ones, who have seen it all, are sorry for this neophyte, who has no idea of what is really happening.

He, she, is flattered, pleased.

But ask in a year's time what he or she is thinking – I've heard them: "This is the worst thing that could have happened to me," they say.

Some much publicised new writers haven't written again, or haven't written what they wanted to, meant to.

And we, the old ones, want to whisper into those innocent ears. "Have you still got your space? Your soul, your own and necessary place where your own voices may speak to you, you alone, where you may dream. Oh, hold onto it, don't let it go."

My mind is full of splendid memories of Africa which I can revive and look at whenever I want. How about those sunsets, gold and purple and orange, spreading across the sky at evening. How about butterflies and

moths and bees on the aromatic bushes of the Kalahari? Or, sitting on the pale grassy banks of the Zambesi, the water dark and glossy, with all the birds of Africa darting about. Yes, elephants, giraffes, lions and the rest, there were plenty of those, but how about the sky at night, still unpolluted, black and wonderful, full of restless stars.

There are other memories too. A young African man, eighteen perhaps, in tears, standing in what he hopes will be his "library." A visiting American seeing that his library had no books, had sent a crate of them. The young man had taken each one out, reverently, and wrapped them in plastic. "But," we say, "these books were sent to be read, surely?" "No," he replies, "they will get dirty, and where will I get any more?"

This young man wants us to send him books from England to use as teaching guides.

"I only did four years in senior school," he says, "but they never taught me to teach."

I have seen a teacher in a school where there were no textbooks, not even a chalk for the blackboard. He taught his class of six to eighteen year olds by moving stones in the dust, chanting "Two times two is …" and so on. I have seen a girl, perhaps not more than twenty, also lacking textbooks, exercise books, biros, seen her teach the A B C by scratching the letters in the dirt with a stick, while the sun beat down and the dust swirled.

We are witnessing here that great hunger for education in Africa, anywhere in the Third World, or whatever we call parts of the world where parents long to get an education for their children which will take them out of poverty.

I would like you to imagine yourselves somewhere in Southern Africa, standing in an Indian store, in a poor area, in a time of bad drought. There is a line of people, mostly women, with every kind of container for water. This store gets a bowser of precious water every afternoon from the town, and here the people wait.

The Indian is standing with the heels of his hands pressed down on the counter, and he is watching a black woman, who is bending over a wadge of paper that looks as if it has been torn from a book. She is reading *Anna Karenin.*
She is reading slowly, mouthing the words. It looks a difficult book. This is a young woman with two little children clutching at her legs. She is pregnant. The Indian is distressed, because the young woman's headscarf, which should be white, is yellow with dust. Dust lies between her breasts and on her arms. This man is distressed because of the lines of people, all thirsty. He doesn't have enough water for them. He is angry

because he knows there are people dying out there, beyond the dust clouds. His older brother had been here holding the fort, but he had said he needed a break, had gone into town, really rather ill, because of the drought.

This man is curious. He says to the young woman, "What are you reading?"

"It is about Russia," says the girl.

"Do you know where Russia is?" He hardly knows himself.

The young woman looks straight at him, full of dignity, though her eyes are red from dust, "I was best in the class. My teacher said I was best."

The young woman resumes her reading. She wants to get to the end of the paragraph.

The Indian looks at the two little children and reaches for some Fanta, but the mother says, "Fanta makes them thirstier."

The Indian knows he shouldn't do this but he reaches down to a great plastic container beside him, behind the counter, and pours out two mugs of water, which he hands to the children. He watches while the girl looks at her children drinking, her mouth moving. He gives her a mug of water. It hurts him to see her drinking it, so painfully thirsty is she.

Now she hands him her own plastic water container, which he fills. The young woman and the children watch him closely so that he doesn't spill any.

She is bending again over the book. She reads slowly. The paragraph fascinates her and she reads it again.

"Varenka, with her white kerchief over her black hair, surrounded by the children and gaily and good-humouredly busy with them, and at the same visibly excited at the possibility of an offer of marriage from a man she cared for, looked very attractive. Koznyshev walked by her side and kept casting admiring glances at her. Looking at her, he recalled all the delightful things he had heard from her lips, all the good he knew about her, and became more and more conscious that the feeling he had for her was something rare, something he had felt but once before, long, long ago, in his early youth. The joy of being near her increased step by step, and at last reached such a point that, as he put a huge birch mushroom with a slender stalk and up-curling top into her basket, he looked into her eyes and, noting the flush of glad and frightened agitation

that suffused her face, he was confused himself, and in silence gave her a smile that said too much."
This lump of print is lying on the counter, together with some old copies of magazines, some pages of newspapers with pictures of girls in bikinis.

It is time for the woman to leave the haven of the Indian store, and set off back along the four miles to her village. Outside, the lines of waiting women clamour and complain. But still the Indian lingers. He knows what it will cost this girl – going back home, with the two clinging children. He would give her the piece of prose that so fascinates her, but he cannot really believe this splinter of a girl with her great belly can really understand it.

Why is perhaps a third of *Anna Karenin* here on this counter in a remote Indian store? It is like this.
A certain high official, from the United Nations as it happens, bought a copy of this novel in a bookshop before he set out on his journey to cross several oceans and seas. On the plane, settled in his business class seat, he tore the book into three parts. He looked around his fellow passengers as he did this, knowing he would see looks of shock, curiosity, but some of amusement. When he was settled, his seat belt tight, he said aloud to whomever could hear, "I always do this when I've a long trip. You don't want to have to hold up some heavy great book." The novel was a paperback, but, true, it is a long book. This man is well used to people listening when he spoke. "I always do this, travelling," he confided. "Travelling at all these days, is hard enough." And as soon as people were settling down, he opened his part of *Anna Karenin,* and read. When people looked his way, curiously or not, he confided in them. "No, it really is the only way to travel." He knew the novel, liked it, and this original mode of reading did add spice to what was after all a well known book.
When he reached the end of a section of the book, he called the air hostess, and sent the chapters back to his secretary, travelling in the cheaper seats. This caused much interest, condemnation, certainly curiosity, every time a section of the great Russian novel arrived, mutilated but readable, in the back part of the plane. Altogether, this clever way of reading Anna *Karenin* makes an impression, and probably no one there would forget it.

Meanwhile, in the Indian store, the young woman is holding on to the counter, her little children clinging to her skirts. She wears jeans, since she is a modern woman, but over them she has put on the heavy woollen skirt, part of the traditional dress of her people: her children can easily cling onto its thick folds.

She sends a thankful look to the Indian, whom she knew liked her and was sorry for her, and she steps out into the blowing clouds.

The children are past crying, and their throats are full of dust.

This was hard, oh yes, it was hard, this stepping, one foot after another, through the dust that lay in soft deceiving mounds under her feet. Hard, but she was used to hardship, was she not? Her mind was on the story she had been reading. She was thinking, She is just like me, in her white headscarf, and she is looking after children, too. I could be her, that Russian girl. And the man there, he loves her and will ask her to marry him. She had not finished more than that one paragraph. Yes, she thinks, a man will come for me, and take me away from all this, take me and the children, yes, he will love me and look after me.

She steps on. The can of water is heavy on her shoulders. On she goes. The children can hear the water slopping about. Half way she stops, sets down the can.

Her children are whimpering and touching it. She thinks that she cannot open it, because dust would blow in. There is no way she can open the can until she gets home.

"Wait," she tells her children, "wait."

She has to pull herself together and go on.

She thinks, My teacher said there is a library, bigger than the supermarket, a big building and it is full of books. The young woman is smiling as she moves on, the dust blowing in her face. I am clever, she thinks. Teacher said I am clever. The cleverest in the school – she said I was. My children will be clever, like me. I will take them to the library, the place full of books, and they will go to school, and they will be teachers – my teacher told me I could be a teacher. My children will live far from here, earning money. They will live near the big library and enjoy a good life.

You may ask how that piece of the Russian novel ever ended up on that counter in the Indian store?

It would make a pretty story. Perhaps someone will tell it.

On goes that poor girl, held upright by thoughts of the water she will give her children once home, and drink a little of herself. On she goes, through the dreaded dusts of an African drought.

We are a jaded lot, we in our threatened world. We are good for irony and even cynicism. Some words and ideas we hardly use, so worn out have they become. But we may want to restore some words that have lost their potency.

We have a treasure-house of literature, going back to the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans. It is all there, this wealth of literature, to be discovered again and again by whoever is lucky enough to come upon it. A treasure. Suppose it did not exist. How impoverished, how empty we would be.

We own a legacy of languages, poems, histories, and it is not one that will ever be exhausted. It is there, always.

We have a bequest of stories, tales from the old storytellers, some of whose names we know, but some not. The storytellers go back and back, to a clearing in the forest where a great fire burns, and the old shamans dance and sing, for our heritage of stories began in fire, magic, the spirit world. And that is where it is held, today.

Ask any modern storyteller and they will say there is always a moment when they are touched with fire, with what we like to call inspiration, and this goes back and back to the beginning of our race, to the great winds that shaped us and our world.

The storyteller is deep inside every one of us. The story-maker is always with us. Let us suppose our world is ravaged by war, by the horrors that we all of us easily imagine. Let us suppose floods wash through our cities, the seas rise. But the storyteller will be there, for it is our imaginations which shape us, keep us, create us – for good and for ill. It is our stories that will recreate us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is the storyteller, the dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best, and at our most creative.

That poor girl trudging through the dust, dreaming of an education for her children, do we think that we are better than she is – we, stuffed full of food, our cupboards full of clothes, stifling in our superfluities?

I think it is that girl, and the women who were talking about books and an education when they had not eaten for three days, that may yet define us.

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Interview

Interview, April 2008

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/interview/

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Interview with the 2007 Nobel Laureate in Literature Doris Lessing
at her home in London, 14 April 2008. The interviewer is Professor John Mullan.

Doris Lessing talks about the inspiration for her first book, 'The Grass is Singing', the autobiographical nature of her 'Children of Violence' sequence of novels (10:29), 'The Golden Notebook' (12:23) and how it became a cult book (21:30), and why she took a foray into science fiction writing with her 'Canopus in Argos' series of novels (22:50). She also talks about the two novels she published under the pseudonym Jane Somers (26:45), why her autobiographies go no further than 1962 (36:55), and being an earth mother in the 1960s (37:20). Finally, she discusses her latest novel, 'Alfred and Emily', which explores the life of her parents and the horrors of war (44:30).

Interview, October 2007

Telephone interview with Doris Lessing following the announcement of the 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature, 11 October 2007. The interviewer is Adam Smith, Editor-in-Chief of Nobelprize.org.

Transcript of the interview

[Doris Lessing] – Hello.

[Adam Smith] – Good morning, may I speak to Doris Lessing please?

[DL] – Who is that?

[AS] – This is Adam Smith from the Nobel Foundation's website. We have a tradition of recording very short interviews on the telephone with new Laureates for our archives, and I was hoping that we might speak for just a very few minutes?

[DL] – OK, well let's go ahead then.

[AS] – Thank you very much indeed. Congratulations, of course.

[DL] – Thank you.

[AS] – I wonder, have you had a chance to see the citation from the Swedish Academy?

[DL] – No, not really, I haven't seen it. You know, I was coming back at midday from taking my son to the hospital. I've never seen anything written, or … I did talk to the chap who runs the Nobel Committee.

[AS] – So you've spoken to Horace Engdahl?

[DL] – Yes.

[AS] – They describe you, in their citation, as "that epicist of the female experience, who with scepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilisation to scrutiny". Do you think that goes some way towards capturing the mission with which you write?

[DL] – Well I don't really know what they had in mind when they wrote it, you see. I mean they were faced with a quite astonishing number and range of writing. To sum it all up must have been quite *formidable*, don't you think?
[AS] – Yes, indeed.

[DL] – Not easy at all.

[AS] – Well over 50 books and a combination of styles of writing which defies description. Quite so. Do you think of yourself as having a mission when you write though, more than to tell stories?

[DL] – Absolutely not. No, because don't forget that I was a communist once, and we had very, very nasty examples of the writer as engineer of the human soul. It's enough to make any of us scared. You know, I was of that generation.

[AS] – So you leave it to the reader to decide what mission they find in your writing?

[DL] – Well you know the reader does anyway. The reader makes up his or her mind and the writer goes along with it. There's nothing you can do, really, if they get something that you've written absolutely wrong. You're not then going to issue a sort of statement saying "Oh dear, that's not right at all. What I really meant was something else." No, no, you write, and then they make what they want of it.

[AS] – And so, for those who … on past experience the award of the Nobel Prize will encourage millions to come to your writing who haven't been there before. For those who haven't experienced your writing, would you suggest a starting place for them?

[DL] – Well I'm going to suggest something that might surprise you, simply because I know the young people like it. It's *The Fifth Child*. Much to my surprise, I found out that the adolescents like it very much. So they could begin with that, and see how they did. I've written an adventure story called *Mara and Dan*, which I know young people like, about the … Then my very first novel, *The Grass is Singing*, is still very much alive. They might like to try that.
[AS] – Your productivity is of course phenomenal, and I suppose some people may wonder just how you manage to produce so much literature. Is it that you have an unstoppable workaholic tendency? Do you just have so many stories to tell? What drives it?

[DL] – Well, it's certainly true that I have a, I'm driven myself, about writing. But you know I don't do anything else. I don't have much of a social life, and I've been very circumscribed by other circumstances in my life which keep me writing. You know, if I hadn't (I am a naturally social person) I think I would have frittered away my life having fun, which I'm quite good at.

[AS] – So is this a self-imposed exile, or is it just that writing always presented itself as a better possibility?

[DL] – Well it's what I do. I naturally turn to it, always. I always, I'm usually thinking about what I'm writing now. But you know I don't have a great range of other interests, let's put it like that. For one reason or another.

[AS] – And seeing the televised coverage of your reaction to the news yesterday, one might guess the answer to this question, but how does the prospect of the increased attention that the prize will focus on you, um, grab you?

[DL] – Oh I don't think … you know, people are going to lose all interest in a month or two. They can't spend all their time wanting interviews. And I haven't got time you know. I haven't got time for all that. So the problem will solve itself.

[AS] – One other question I wanted to ask is about the range of styles you write in. You've tackled almost everything, except perhaps poetry. Is that a conscious choice to try and expand your repertoire, or are these just the forms that you need to use to express yourself?

[DL] – No, once I have an idea, a story, or something, in my mind, then it has to find the right expression. You know, I don't say "Oh, now I'm going to write a, I don't know what, a realistic book of 50,000 words". What happens is that the book, the story dictates how I'm going to have to do it. The story dictates the means of telling it. So I have written a lot of different styles, if you want to call it that, because I've written a lot of different stories. It's not at all a question of wanting to try out this or try out that. I mean when I started to write

the *Shikasta* series, which covers millions of years, that fact in itself dictates a style. You can't start that by saying, "Oh well, Joe Bloggs sat in his kitchen and drank a cup of Typhoo tea, and wrote a letter to his sister-in-law". You have to have a different way of doing it. So that's how that comes about.
[AS] – Yes. It has perhaps contributed to the length of time that the Swedish Academy has taken to make the decision to award you the Nobel Prize that you've adopted styles that are perhaps non-traditional.

[DL] – I think that, probably, the Nobel people didn't like what they call 'Science Fiction'. I mean I think it's a very mistaken label that they use, but they probably were put off by, I mean *Memoirs of a Survivor* for example, or *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*. These are hardly easy to categorize. It probably was difficult for them.
[AS] – Well there seem to be a lot of people who are delighted by the choice. There was an enormous cheer went up when Horace Engdahl announced your name yesterday.

[DL] – Thank you, thank you, thank you.

[AS] – Well thank you very much for speaking to us and when you come to Stockholm in December to receive the award I think Horace Engdahl is going to interview you at greater length. So we look forward to seeing you then.

[DL] – See you then. OK, thank you.

[AS] – Thank you very much indeed.

[DL] – Bye.

[AS] – Bye, bye.

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Prose

Excerpt from *The Grass is Singing*

MURDER MYSTERY
By Special Correspondent

Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner, a farmer at Ngesi, was found murdered on the front veranda of their homestead yesterday morning. The houseboy, who

has been arrested, has confessed to the crime. No motive has been discovered. It is thought he was in search of valuables.

The newspaper did not say much. People all over the country must have glanced at the paragraph with its sensational heading and felt a little spurt of anger mingled with what was almost satisfaction, as if some belief had been confirmed, as if something had happened which could only have been expected. When natives steal, murder, or rape, that is the feeling white people have.

And then they turned the page to something else.

But the people in the 'district' who knew the Turners, either by sight or from gossiping about them for so many years, did not turn the page so quickly. Many must have snipped out the paragraph, put it among old letters or between the pages of a book, keeping it perhaps as an omen or a warning, glancing at the yellowing piece of paper with closed, secretive faces. For they did not discuss the murder; that was the most extraordinary thing about it. It was as if they had a sixth sense which told them everything there was to be known, although the three people in a position to explain the facts said nothing. The murder was simply not discussed. 'A bad business,' someone would remark; and the faces of the people round about would put on that reserved and guarded look. 'A very bad business,' came the reply – and that was the end of it. There was, it seemed, a tacit agreement that the Turner case should not be given undue publicity by gossip. Yet it was a farming district, where those isolated white families met only very occasionally, hungry for contact with their own kind, to talk and discuss and pull to pieces, all speaking at once, making the most of an hour or so's companionship before returning to their farms, where they saw only their own faces and the faces of their black servants for weeks on end. Normally that murder would have been discussed for months; people would have been positively grateful for something to talk about.

To an outsider it would seem perhaps as if the energetic Charlie Slatter had travelled from farm to farm over the district telling people to keep quiet; but that was something that would never have occurred to him. The steps he took (and he made not one mistake) were taken apparently instinctively and without conscious planning. The most interesting thing about the whole affair was this silent, unconscious agreement. Everyone behaved like a flock of birds who communicate – or so it seems – by means of a kind of telepathy.

Long before the murder marked them out, people spoke of the Turners in the hard, careless voices reserved for misfits, outlaws, and the self-exiled. The Turners were disliked, though few of their neighbours had ever met them, or even seen them in the distance. Yet what was there to dislike? They simply 'kept themselves to themselves'; that was all. They were never seen at district dances, or fêtes, or gymkhanas. They must have had something to be ashamed of; that was the feeling. It was not right to seclude themselves like that; it was a slap in the face of everyone else; what had they got to be so stuck-up about? What, indeed! Living the way they did! That little box of a house – it was forgivable as a temporary dwelling, but not to live in permanently. Why, some natives (though not many, thank heavens) had houses as good; and it would give them a bad impression to see white people living in such a way.

And then it was that someone used the phrase 'poor whites'. It caused disquiet. There was no great money-cleavage in those days (that was before the era of the tobacco barons), but there was certainly a race division. The small community of Afrikaners had their own lives, and the Britishers ignored them. 'Poor whites' were Afrikaners, never British. But the person who said the Turners were poor whites stuck to it defiantly. What was the difference? What was a poor white? It was the way one lived, a question of standards. All the Turners needed were a drove of children to make them poor whites.

Though the arguments were unanswerable, people would still not think of them as poor whites. To do that would be letting the side down. The Turners were British, after all.

Thus the district handled the Turners, in accordance with that *esprit de corps* which is the first rule of South African society, but which the Turners themselves ignored. They apparently did not recognize the need for *esprit de corps*; that, really, was why they were hated.

The more one thinks about it, the more extraordinary the case becomes. Not the murder itself; but the way people felt about it, the way they pitied Dick Turner with a fine fierce indignation against Mary, as if she were something unpleasant and unclean, and it served her right to get murdered. But they did not ask questions.

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Speed read:

Exposing the extraordinary in the ordinary

Doris Lessing's career, like that of Mario Capecchi, another 2007 Nobel Laureate, shows that a strict pattern of formal schooling is not the only way to success. Lessing was born in Persia (now Iran), to British parents, but her family moved to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in hope of a better future. However, that future never really materialized and Lessing's childhood was difficult. She ended formal schooling at fourteen, largely educating herself through voracious reading, and left home at fifteen. A lifelong critic of colonialism and racism, she eventually moved to London in 1949.

Given that Lessing has many points of origin, it is perhaps not surprising that she can create such an intense sense of place in her writing. She has written over fifty books, starting with *The Grass is Singing*, set in Africa, and her output includes novels, short stories, a graphic novel, plays, non-fiction, and two operas with Philip Glass. Possible starting points for readers unfamiliar with her work might be the Martha Quest-series of novels and *Time Bites*, a collection of essays published in 2004. In the 1980s, she published two novels under the pseudonym, Jane Somers, to prove just how difficult it is for an unknown name to get their work published. Both novels were rejected by Lessing's usual publisher!

Lessing has said that writing enables her to take something that is raw and unexamined and give it general significance. Her writing is clearly in the tradition of Dickens, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the writers she read as a teenager, with its strong ethical focus and engagement with society. Indeed, perhaps her most famous novel, *The Golden Notebook*, a dissection of a woman's psyche which is torn between emotional, social and creative demands, has been very influential on feminism.

Writing, Lessing says, also gives her freedom – a freedom revealed in her willingness to probe conventions, to give voice to the repressed, dismissed, and inarticulate, but also displayed in her willingness to experiment. She has mixed high literature with more popular forms, like science fiction, and has daringly employed strange combinations of time-schemes, perspective, allegory, and naturalism in an attempt to access what she sees as the deeper reality of mysticism, dreams and even madness. Describing her perspective on her own life as constantly changing, Lessing always remains open to new ideas and possibilities.

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Biobibliographical Notes

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

Doris Lessing was born on 22 October 1919 to British parents in Kermanshah in what was then known as Persia (now Iran) as Doris May Taylor. Her father, Alfred Cook Taylor, formerly a captain in the British army during the First World War, was a bank official. Her mother, Emily Maude Taylor, had been a nurse. In 1925 the family moved to a farm in what was then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) hoping to improve their income. Lessing described her childhood on the farm in the first part of her autobiography, *Under My Skin* (1994). At the age of seven, she was sent to a convent boarding school but later moved to a girls' school in Salisbury. When 14 she independently ended her formal schooling. In the following years she worked as a young nanny, telephonist, office worker, stenographer and journalist and had several short stories published. In 1939 she married Frank Charles Wisdom with whom she had a son, John, and a daughter, Jean. The couple divorced in 1943. In 1945 Doris married Gottfried Lessing, a German-Jewish immigrant she had met in a Marxist group mainly concerned with the race issue. She became involved with the Southern Rhodesian Labour Party. She and Gottfried had a son, Peter. When the couple divorced in 1949, she took Peter and moved to London, quickly establishing herself as a writer. Between 1952 and 1956 she was a member of the British Communist Party and was active in the campaign against nuclear weapons. Because of her criticism of the South African regime, she was prohibited entry to that country between 1956 and 1995. After a brief visit to Southern Rhodesia in 1956, she was banned there as well for the same reason. In *African Laughter: Four*

Visits to Zimbabwe (1992) she described going back in 1982 to the country where she had grown up. She now lives in London.

Doris Lessing made her debut as a novelist with *The Grass is Singing* (1950), which examines the relationship between a white farmer's wife and her black servant. The book is both a tragedy based in love-hatred and a study of unbridgeable racial conflicts.

Even the semi-autobiographical *Children of Violence* series, usually called the Martha Quest series for its main character, is largely set in Africa. The series comprises *Martha Quest* (1952), *A Proper Marriage* (1954), *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958), *Landlocked* (1965) and *The Four-Gated City* (1969). It describes Martha Quest's awakening to greater awareness on every level and was pioneering in its depiction of the mind and circumstances of the emancipated woman. With these books Lessing created a modern equivalent of the *Bildungsroman* of women writers of the 19th century. *The Children of Violence*, despite its emphatic liberation theme, is characterised by an almost fatalistic outlook. The story is told with the mild despair of someone seeing her younger self from the heavens of an afterlife, unable to intervene. The masterpiece is the final volume of the series, *The Four-Gated City*, a period frescoe apparently enveloping all of England – indeed our entire culture – illuminated by the author's empathy and incivility.

The Golden Notebook (1962) was Doris Lessing's real breakthrough. The burgeoning feminist movement saw it as a pioneering work and it belongs to the handful of books that informed the 20th-century view of the male-female relationship. It used a more complex narrative technique to reveal how political and emotion conflicts are intertwined. The style levels of differing documents and experiences mix: newspaper cuttings, news items, films, dreams and diaries. Anna Wulf, the main character, has five notebooks for her thoughts about Africa, politics and the communist party, her relationship to men and sex, Jungian analysis and dream interpretation. The disjointed form reflects that of the main character's mind. There is no single perspective from which to capture the entirety of her life experience.

Books published in the 1970s included *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), inspired by R. D. Laing. Lessing has characterised her novel from this period as "inner-space fiction": an attempt in the spirit of Romanticism to expand human knowledge to encompass regions beyond the control of reason and the ego.
In the novel series *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (vol. 1–5, 1979–1984) Lessing expanded the science fiction genre. The series studies the post-atomic war development of the human species. Lessing varies thoughts about colonialism, nuclear war and ecological disaster with observations on the opposition between female and male principles. Among inspirations for the work was the Idries Shah's school of Sufism that she discovered in the 1960s. Doris Lessing revisited her interest in Sufism in the *Time Bites* (2004) collection of essays.

Lessing returned to realistic narrative in *The Good Terrorist* (1985), providing a satirical picture of the need of the contemporary left for total control and the female protagonist's misdirected martyrdom and subjugation. Her analysis of the greenhouse for the terrorist mind in generation hatred and an *Übermensch* attitude retains currency.

The autobiographical *Under My Skin* (1994) and *Walking in the Shade* (1997) represented a new peak in her writing. Lessing recalls not only her own life but the entire epoch: England in the last days of the empire. Her novel *The Sweetest Dream* (2001) is a stand-alone sequel in fictive form. Perhaps her unsparing view of the polical antics of friends and lovers necessitated such discretion.

Her other important novels are *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973) and *The Fifth Child* (1988). In the former, the reader at first infers a liberation motif: a woman finally about to fulfil her gift and sexual desires. After a first reading, the contours of the real novel take shape: a ruthless study of the collapse of values in middle age. *The Fifth Child* is a masterfully realised psychological thriller, where a woman's repressed or denied aggression against family life is incarnated in a monstrous boy child.

The vision of global catastrophe forcing mankind to return to a more primitive life has had special appeal for Doris Lessing. It reappears in some of her books of recent years: the fantasy novel *Mara and Dann* (1999) and its sequel *The Story of General Dann and Mara's Daughter, Griot and the Snow Dog* (2005). From collapse and chaos emerge the elementary qualities that allow Lessing to retain hope in humanity.

Literary Prizes: Somerset Maugham Award (1954), Prix Médicis étranger (1976), Österreichischer Staatspreis für Europäische Literatur (1981), Shakespeare-Preis der Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F. V. S., Hamburg (1982), W. H. Smith Literary Award (1986), Palermo Prize (1987), Premio Internazionale Mondello (1987), Premio Grinzane Cavour (1989), James Tait Black Memorial Book Prize (1995), Los Angeles Times Book Prize (1995), Premio Internacional Catalunya (1999), David Cohen British Literary Prize (2001), Companion of Honour from the Royal Society of Literature (2001), Premio Principe de Asturias (2001), S.T. Dupont Golden PEN Award (2002).

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Våra ord blåser bort med vinden : *rapportbok från Afghanistan* / översättning: Lars Hansson. – Stockholm : Trevi, 1987. – Originaltitel: The Wind Blows Away Our Words

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Ljuvaste dröm / översättning: Inger Johansson. – Stockholm : Forum, 2003. – Originaltitel: The Sweetest Dream

Kärleksbarnet / översättning: Annika Preis. – Stockholm : Forum, 2005. – Originaltitel: The Grandmothers

Om katter. – Stockholm : Forum, 2006. – Innehåll: *Katter* / översättning: Harriet Alfons och Jadwiga P. Westrup; *Rufus* / översättning: Solveig Nellinge; *El Magnifico* / översättning: Annika Preis

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Martha Quest : *Roman* / Aus dem Engl. übers. von Karin Kersten u. Iris Wagner. – Stuttgart : Klett-Cotta, 1981. – (Kinder der Gewalt; 1). – Originaltitel: Martha Quest

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Press Release

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

The Permanent Secretary
Press release
11 October 2007

The Nobel Prize in Literature 2007
Doris Lessing

The Nobel Prize in Literature for 2007 is awarded
to the English writer Doris Lessing

"that epicist of the female experience, who with scepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilisation to scrutiny".

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Awards and Honors

- Somerset Maugham Award (1954)
- *Prix Médicis étranger* (1976)
- Austrian State Prize for European Literature (1981)

- Shakespeare Prize of the Alfred Toepfer Foundation, Hamburg (1982)
- WH Smith Literary Award (1986)
- Palermo Prize (1987)
- *Premio Internazionale Mondello* (1987)
- Grinzane Cavour Prize (1989)
- James Tait Black Memorial Prize for biography (1995)
- Los Angeles Times Book Prize (1995)
- Catalonia International Prize (1999)[57]
- Member of the Order of the Companions of Honour (1999)
- Companion of Literature of the Royal Society of Literature (2000)
- David Cohen Prize (2001)
- *Premio Príncipe de Asturias* (2001)
- S.T. Dupont Golden PEN Award (2002)
- Nobel Prize in Literature (2007)
- Order of Mapungubwe: Category II Gold (2008)

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Videos

01] Doris Lessing wins Nobel Prize for Literature (2007) - Newsnight archives

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPv6Gbof4BM [9:54]

02] Doris Lessing Interview

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zs_hZm6LD44 [47:21]

03] Doris Lessing - The Reluctant Heroine

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLYbX3R9gls [1:00:37]

04] Doris Lessing: The Golden Notebook

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzG8konNs1w [30:15]

05] Doris Lessing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJlOp8katD4 [41:01]

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10 Jul 1931

13 May 2024

Alice Munro

Nobel Prize in Literature 2013

Born: 10 July 1931, Wingham, Canada
Died: 13 May 2024, Port Hope, Canada
Residence at the time of the award: Canada

Prize motivation:

"master of the contemporary short story"

Language: English
Prize share:
{1/1https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2013/munro/facts/}

Links to other sites

[01] On Alice Munro from from Pegasos Author's Calendar
[02] Alice Munro's short story 'Train' from Harper's Magazine

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Photo Gallery

Kindly visit the Web Page to view the Photos
https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2013/munro/photo-gallery/

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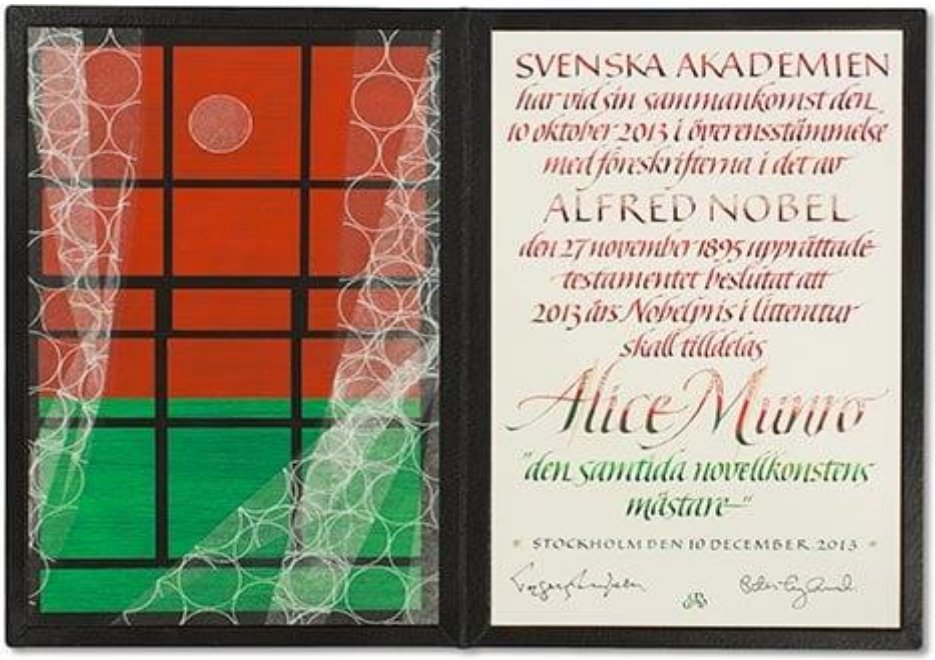
Nobel Diploma



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Prize Presentation

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2013/munro/prize-presentation/
[2:12]

Watch a video clip of Mrs Jenny Munro receiving the Nobel Medal and Diploma on behalf of her mother Alice Munro during the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony at the Concert Hall in Stockholm, Sweden, on 10 December 2013.

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Prize announcement

Announcement of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature to Alice Munro, presented by Professor Peter Englund, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, on 10 October 2013.

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2013/prize-announcement/

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Professor Peter Englund,
Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy,
Secretary of the Nobel Committee for Literature, 10 December 2013.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Esteemed Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It may seem like a paradox, but it is actually quite logical: what we call world literature is generally rooted in the local and individual. In her writing, Alice Munro portrays with almost anthropological precision a recognisable, tranquil everyday world with predictable external accoutrements; her equivalent of William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County is located in south-western Ontario. This flat Canadian agricultural landscape, with its broad rivers and seemingly bland small towns, is where most of her short stories unfold. But the serenity and simplicity are deceptive in every way.

The tranquillity of the outer world is always apparent in Alice Munro's works, which then open the portals to an inner world where the opposite is true. Munro writes about what are usually called ordinary people, but her intelligence, compassion and astonishing power of perception enable her to give their lives a remarkable dignity – indeed redemption – since she shows how much of the extraordinary can fit into that jam-packed emptiness called The Ordinary. The trivial and trite are intertwined with the amazing and unfathomable – but never at the cost of contradiction. If you have never before fantasised about the strangers you see on a bus, you begin doing so after having read Alice Munro.

Her short stories rely very little on external drama. They are an emotional chamber play, a world of silences and lies, waiting and longing. The biggest events occur inside of her characters. The greatest pain remains unexpressed. Like few others, she is interested in the silent and the silenced, the passive, those who choose not to choose, who live on the sidelines, the quitters and losers. Barriers of gender and class are never far away in her works.

In the mental topography that is Munro's own, what might have happened is often just as important as what actually happened. Of key importance are all the things her characters could not or did not wish to understand there and then, but that only long afterward stand revealed, at best in the form of an epiphany. She shows that our innermost self is essentially inaccessible to other people, often eluding even ourselves – until it is too late.

In an uncompromising way, Alice Munro demonstrates that love rarely saves us or leads to reliable happiness, and that few things can be as devastating to us as our own dreams. Sexuality is constantly present and its power is gripping, but often blind and even devastating. Even though genuine happiness may occur, sometimes accidentally, people rarely go unpunished for believing in romantic love. This might seem unbearably dark, or even painful, if her piercing lucidity were not mixed with something that – for want of a better word – I must call tenderness. If you read a lot of Alice Munro's works carefully, sooner or later, in one of her short stories, you will come face to face with yourself; this is an encounter that always leaves you shaken and often changed, but never crushed.

The seemingly prosaic surface level in Alice Munro's short stories is interwoven in an interesting way with her writing style and distinctive storytelling technique. The minimalist style we encounter is clean, transparent, subtle and stunningly precise. It is a challenge to find an unessential word or a superfluous phrase. Reading one of her texts is like watching a cat walk across a laid dinner table. A brief short story can often cover decades, summarising a life, as she moves deftly between different periods. No wonder Alice Munro is often able to say more in 30 pages than an ordinary novelist is capable of in 300. She is a virtuoso of the elliptical and – as the Academy said in its brief prize citation – the master of the contemporary short story.

Over the years, numerous prominent scientists have received their well-deserved reward in this auditorium for having solved some of the great enigmas of the universe or of our material existence. But you, Alice Munro, like few others, have come close to solving the greatest mystery of them all: the human heart and its caprices.

The Swedish Academy congratulates you. I now ask Jenny Munro to rise and, in her mother's place, receive the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature from the hand of His Majesty the King.

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The Nobel Prize Award Ceremony 2013

Watch the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony from the Stockholm Concert Hall in Sweden, 10 December 2013.

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2013/award-video/

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Nobel Lecture
in absentia, by Alice Munro

In Her Own Words
The 2013 Nobel Lecture in Literature was replaced
by a pre-recorded video conversation with the Laureate:
"Alice Munro: In Her Own Words",
shown at the Swedish Academy on 7 December 2013.

Alice Munro:
In her Own Words

Conversation with Alice Munro
By Stefan Åsberg, SVT

The English text concerning the conversation has been the necessary starting point for the Swedish version. As the work has been done during some shortage of time, minor divergences in the English text can be found.

I got interested in reading very early, because a story was read to me, by Hans Christian Andersen, which was *The Little Mermaid*, and I don't know if you remember *The Little Mermaid*, but it's dreadfully sad. The little mermaid falls in love with this prince, but she cannot marry him, because she is a mermaid. And it's so sad I can't tell you the details. But anyway, as soon as I had finished this story I got outside and walked around and around the house where we lived, at the brick house, and I made up a story with a happy ending, because I thought that was due to the little mermaid, and it sort of slipped my mind that it was only made up to be a different story for me, it wasn't going to go all around the world, but I felt I had done my best, and from now on the little mermaid would marry the prince and live happily ever after, which was certainly her desert, because she had done awful things to win the prince's power, his ease. She had had to change her limbs. She had had to get limbs that ordinary people have and walk, but every step she took, agonizing pain! This is what she was willing to go through, to get the prince. So I thought she deserved more than death on the water. And I didn't worry about the fact that maybe the rest of the world wouldn't know the new story, because I felt it had been published once I thought about it. So, there you are. That was an early start, on writing.

And tell us how you learned to tell a story, and write it?
I made stories up all the time, I had a long walk to school, and during that walk I would generally make up stories. As I got older the stories would be more and more about myself, as a heroine in some situation or other, and it didn't bother me that the stories were not going to be published to the world immediately, and I don't know if I even thought about other people knowing them or reading them. It was about the story itself, generally a very satisfying story from my point of view, with the general idea of the little mermaid's bravery, that she was clever, that she was in general able to make a better world, because she would jump in there, and have magic powers and things like that.

Was it important that the story would be told from a woman's perspective?
I never thought of it being important, but I never thought of myself as being anything but a woman, and there were many good stories about little girls and women. After you got maybe into your teens it was more about helping the man to achieve his needs and so on, but when I was a young girl I had no feeling of inferiority at all about being a woman. And this may have been because I lived in a part of Ontario where women did most of the reading, telling most of the stories, the men were outside doing important things, they didn't go in for stories. So I felt quite at home.

How did that environment inspire you?
You know, I don't think that I needed any inspiration, I thought that stories were so important in the world, and I wanted to make up some of these stories, I wanted to keep on doing this, and it didn't have to do with other people, I didn't need to tell anybody, and it wasn't until much later that I realized that it would be interesting if one got them into a larger audience.

What is important to you when you tell a story?
Well, obviously, in those early days the important thing was the happy ending, I did not tolerate unhappy endings, for my heroines anyway. And later on I began to read things like *Wuthering Heights*, and very very unhappy endings would take place, so I changed my ideas completely and went in for the tragic, which I enjoyed.
What can be so interesting in describing small town Canadian life?
You just have to be there. I think any life can be interesting, any surroundings can be interesting, I don't think I could have been so brave if I had been living in a town, competing with people on what can be called a generally higher cultural level. I didn't have to cope with that. I was the only person I knew who wrote stories, though I didn't tell them to anybody, and as far as I knew, at least for a while, I was the only person who could do this in the world.

Were you always that confident in your writing?
I was for a long time, but I became very unconfident when I grew up and met a few other people who were writing. Then I realized that the job was a bit harder than I had expected. But I never gave up at all, it was just something I did.

When you start a story, do you always have it plotted out?
I do, but then it often changes. I start with a plot, and I work at it, and then I see that it goes another way and things happen as I'm writing the story, but at least I have to start out with a fairly clear idea of what the story is about.

How consumed are you by the story when you start writing?
Oh, desperately. But you know, I always got lunch for my children, did I not? I was a housewife, so I learned to write in times off, and I don't think I ever gave it up, though there were times when I was very discouraged, because I began to see that the stories I was writing were not very good, that I had a lot to learn and that it was a much, much harder job than I had expected. But I didn't stop, I don't think I have ever done that.

What part is hardest when you want to tell a story?
I think probably that part when you go over the story and realize how bad it is. You know, the first part, excitement, the second, pretty good, but then you pick it up one morning and you think "what nonsense", and that is when you really have to get to

work on it. And for me it always seemed the right thing to do, it was my fault if the story was bad, not the story's fault.

But how do you turn it around if you are not satisfied?
Hard work. But I try to think of a better way to explain. You have characters that you haven't given a chance, and you have to think about them or do something quite different with them. In my earlier days I was prone to a lot of flowery prose, and I gradually learned to take a lot of that out. So you just go on thinking about it and finding out more and more what the story was about, which you thought you understood in the beginning, but you actually had a lot more to learn.

How many stories have you thrown away?
Ha, when I was young I threw them all away. I have no idea, but I haven't done that so often in recent years, I generally knew what I had to do to make them live. But there may still always be a mistake somewhere that I realize is a mistake and you just have to forget about it.

Do you ever regret throwing a story away?
I don't think so, because by then I have gone through enough agony about it, knowing that it didn't work from the beginning. But as I say that doesn't happen very often.

Growing older, how does that change your writing?
Oh, well, in a very predictable way. You start out writing about beautiful young princesses and then you write about housewives and children and later on about old women, and this just goes on, without your necessarily trying to do anything to change that. Your vision changes.

Do you think you have been important to other female writers, being a housewife, being able to combine household work with writing?
I actually don't know about that, I would hope that I have been. I think I went to other female writers when I was young, and that was a great encouragement to me, but whether I have been important to others I don't know. I think women have a much, I wouldn't say easier time, but it's much more okay now for women to be doing something important, not just fooling around with a little game that she does while everybody else is out of the house, but to be really serious about writing, as a man would write.

What impact do you think that you have on someone reading your stories, women especially?
Oh, well, I want my stories to move people, I don't care if they are men or women or children. I want my stories to be something about life that causes people to say, not, oh, isn't that the truth, but to feel some kind of reward from the writing, and that doesn't mean that it has to be a happy ending or anything, but just that everything the story tells moves the reader in such a way that you feel you are a different person when you finish.

Who do you think you are? What has that expression meant to you?
Well, I grew up in the countryside, I grew up with people who were generally Scotch-Irish, and it was a very common idea not to try too much, never to think you were

smart. That was another image that was popular, “Ah, you think you are smart.” And to do anything like writing you’d have to think you were smart, for quite a while, but I was just a peculiar person.

Were you an early feminist?
I never knew about the word “feminism”, but of course I was a feminist, because I actually grew up in a part of Canada where women could write more easily than men. The big, important writers would be men, but knowing that a woman wrote stories was probably less to her discredit than if a man wrote stories. Because it was not a man’s occupation. Well, that was very much in my youth, it’s not that way at all now.

Would it have changed your writing if you had finished your university studies?
It might have indeed, it might have made me a lot more cautious and a lot more scared about being a writer, because the more I knew about what people had done, I was naturally rather daunted. I would perhaps have thought I couldn’t do it, but I don’t think it would have happened, really, maybe for a while, but then, I wanted to write so much that I would just have gone ahead and tried it anyway.

Was the writing a gift, given to you?
I don’t think the people around me would have thought that, but I never thought about it as a gift, I just thought that it was something that I could do, if I just tried hard enough. So if it was a gift, it certainly wasn’t an easy gift, not after *The Little Mermaid*.
Did you ever hesitate, did you ever think that you were not good enough?
All the time, all the time! I threw out more stuff than I ever sent away or finished, and that went on all through my twenties something. But I was still learning to write the way I wanted to write. So, no, it wasn’t an easy thing.

What did your mother mean to you?
Oh, my feelings about my mother were very complicated, because she was sick, she had Parkinson’s disease, she needed a lot of help, and her speech was difficult, people couldn’t tell what she was saying, and yet she was a very gregarious person, who wanted very much to be part of a social life, and of course that wasn’t possible for her because of her speech problems. So I was embarrassed by her, I loved her but in a way perhaps didn’t want to be identified with her, I didn’t want to stand out and say the things she wanted me to say to people, it was difficult in the same way that any adolescent would think of a person or a parent who was maimed in some respect. You would want that time to be totally free of such things.

Did she inspire you in any way?
I think she probably did but not in ways I could notice or understand. I can’t remember when I wasn’t writing stories, I mean, I didn’t write them down, but I told them, not to her, to anybody. But the fact that she read, and my father read too … My mother, I think, would have been more agreeable to someone who wanted to be a writer. She would have thought that was an admirable thing to be, but the people around me didn’t know that I wanted to be a writer, cause I didn’t let them find out, it would have seemed to most people ridiculous. Because most people I knew didn’t read, they took to life in a very practical way and my whole idea of life had to be rather sheltered from people I knew.

Has it been hard to tell a true story from a woman's perspective?
No, not at all, because that's the way I think, being a woman and all, and it never bothered me. You know this is kind of a special thing with growing up as I did, if anybody read, it was the women, if anybody had the education it was often the woman; it would have been a school teacher or something like that, and far from being closed to women, the world of reading and writing was widely more open to women than it was to men, men being farmers or doing different kinds of work.

And you were brought up in a working class home?
Yes.

And that's where your stories start as well?
Yes. I didn't realize it was a working class home, I just looked at where I was and wrote about it.

And did you like the fact always to write at specific times, looking at a schedule, taking care of the kids, cooking dinner?
Well, I wrote whenever I could, and my first husband was very helpful, to him writing was an admirable thing to do. He didn't think of it as something that a woman couldn't do, as many of the men that I met later did, he took it as something that he wanted me to do and never wavered from that.

In the Bookstore

It was great fun in the first place, because we moved in here, determined to open a bookstore, and everybody thought we were crazy and would starve to death, but we didn't. We worked very hard.

How important was the bookstore in the beginning for the two of you, when it all started?
It was our livelihood. It was all we had. We didn't have any other source of income. The first day when we opened we made 175 dollars. – Which you thought was a lot. Well, it was, cause it took us a long time to get back to that again.

I used to sit behind the desk and find the books for people and handle all the things you do in a bookstore, generally just by myself, and people came in and talked about books a lot, it was very much a place for people to get together rather than immediately buy things, and this was especially true at night, when I'd be sitting here by myself, and I had these people come in every night, talking to me about something, and it was great, it was a lot of fun. Up until this point I had been a housewife, I was at home all the time, I was a writer as well, but this was a wonderful chance to get into the world. I don't think we made much money, possibly I talked to people a little too much, you know, instead of getting them to the books, but it was a fantastic time in my life.

Visitor in the bookstore: *Your books remind me of home. – Yes, I live right south of Amsterdam. Thank you so much, goodbye.*
Think of that! Well, I love it when someone just comes up to you like that, when it's not only a matter of getting autographs, but of telling you why.

[During the Nobel programme on December 7 an excerpt from the short story 'Carried Away' was read by the Swedish actor Pernilla August. Se below.]

Do you want young women to be inspired by your books and feel inspired to write?
I don't care what they feel as long as they enjoy reading the book. I want people to find not so much inspiration as great enjoyment. That's what I want; I want people to enjoy my books, to think of them as related to their own lives in ways. But that isn't the major thing. I am trying to say that I am not, I guess I am not a political person.

Are you a cultural person?
Probably. I am not quite sure what that means, but I think I am.

You seem to have a very simple view on things?
Do I? Well, yes.

Well, I read somewhere that you want things to be explained in an easy way.
Yes, I do. But I never think that I want to explain things more easily, that's just the way I write. I think I write naturally in an easy way, without thinking that this was to be made easier.

Have you ever run into periods when you haven't been able to write?
Yes, I have. Well, I gave up writing, when was it, maybe a year ago, but that was a decision, that was not wanting to write and not being able to, a decision that I wanted to behave like the rest of the world. Because when you are writing you are doing something that other people don't know you are doing, and you can't really talk about it, you are always finding your way in this secret world, and then you are doing something else in the normal world. And I am sort of getting tired of that, I have done it all my life, absolutely all my life. When I got in company with writers who were in a way more academic, then I became a little flustered, because I knew I couldn't write that way, I didn't have that gift.

I guess it's a different way of telling a story?
Yes, and I never worked on it in a, what shall I say, conscious way, well, of course I was conscious, I worked in a way that comforted and pleased myself more than in a way that followed some kind of idea.

Did you ever see yourself win the Nobel Prize?
Oh, no, no! I was a woman! But there are women who have won it, I know. I just love the honour, I love it, but I just didn't think that way, because most writers probably underestimate their work, especially after it's done. You don't go around and tell your friends that I will probably win the Nobel Prize. That is not a common way of greeting one!

Do you ever go back these days and read any of your old books?
No! No! I am afraid to! No, but then I would probably get a terrific urge to change just a little bit here, a little bit there, and I have even done that in certain copies of my books that I would take out of the cupboard, but then I realize that it doesn't matter if I change them, because it's not changed out there.

Is there anything you want to say to the people in Stockholm?
Oh, I want to say that I am so grateful for this great honour, that nothing, nothing in the world could make me so happy as this! Thank you!

LETTERS

In the dining room of the Commercial Hotel, Louisa opened the letter that had arrived that day from overseas. She ate steak and potatoes, her usual meal, and drank a glass of wine. There were a few travellers in the room, and the dentist who ate there every night because he was a widower. He had shown an interest in her in the beginning but had told her he had never before seen a woman touch wine or spirits.

"It is for my health," said Louisa gravely.

The white tablecloths were changed every week and in the meantime were protected by oilcloth mats. In winter, the dining room smelled of these mats wiped by a kitchen rag, and of coal fumes from the furnace, and beef gravy and dried potatoes and onions—a smell not unpleasant to anybody coming in hungry from the cold. On each table was a little cruet stand with the bottle of brown sauce, the bottle of tomato sauce, and the pot of horseradish.

The letter was addressed to "The Librarian, Carstairs Public Library, Carstairs, Ontario." It was dated six weeks before—January 4, 1917.

Perhaps you will be surprised to hear from a person you don't know and that doesn't remember your name.

I hope you are still the same Librarian though enough time has gone by that you could have moved on.

What has landed me here in Hospital is not too serious. I see worse all around me and get my mind off of all that by picturing things and wondering for instance if you are still there in the Library. If you are the one I mean, you are about of medium size or perhaps not quite, with light brownish hair. You came a few months before it was time for me to go in the Army following on Miss Tamblyn who had been there since I first became a user aged nine or ten. In her time the books were pretty much every which way, and it was as much as your life was worth to ask her for the least help or anything since she was quite a dragon. Then when you came what a change, it was all put into sections of Fiction and Non-Fiction and History and Travel and you got the magazines arranged in order and put out as soon as they arrived, not left to molder away till everything in them was stale. I felt gratitude but did not know how to say so. Also I wondered what brought you there, you were an educated person.

My name is Jack Agnew and my card is in the drawer. The last book I took out was very good—H. G. Wells, Mankind in the Making. My education was to Second Form in High School, then I went into Douds as many did. I didn't join up right away when I was eighteen so you will not see me as a Brave Man. I am a person tending to have my own ideas always. My only relative in Carstairs, or anyplace, is my father Patrick Agnew. He works for Douds not at the factory but at the house doing the gardening. He is a lone wolf even more than me and goes out to the country fishing every chance he gets. I write him a letter sometimes but I doubt if he reads it.

After supper Louisa went up to the Ladies' Parlor on the second floor, and sat down at the desk to write her reply.

I am very glad to hear you appreciated what I did in the Library though it was just the normal organization, nothing special.

I am sure you would like to hear news of home, but I am a poor person for the job, being an outsider here. I do talk to people in the Library and in the hotel. The travellers in the hotel mostly talk about how business is (it is brisk if you can get the goods) and a little about sickness, and a lot about the War. There are rumors on rumors and opinions galore, which I'm sure would make you laugh if they didn't make you angry. I will not bother to write them down because I am sure there is a Censor reading this who would cut my letter to ribbons.

You ask how I came here. There is no interesting story. My parents are both dead. My father worked for Eaton's in Toronto in the Furniture Department, and after his death my mother worked there too in Linens.

And I also worked there for a while in Books. Perhaps you could say Eaton's was our Douds. I graduated from Jarvis Collegiate. I had some sickness which put me in hospital for a long time, but I am quite well now.

I had a great deal of time to read and my favorite authors are Thomas Hardy, who is accused of being gloomy but I think is very true to life—and Willa Cather. I just happened to be in this town when I heard the Librarian had died and I thought, perhaps that is the job for me.

A good thing your letter reached me today as I am about to be discharged from here and don t know if it would have been sent on to where I am going. I am glad you did not think my letter was too foolish.

If you run into my father or anybody you do not need to say anything about the fact we are writing to each other. It is nobody's business and I know there are plenty of people would laugh at me writing to the Librarian as they did at me going to the Library even, why give them the satisfaction?

I am glad to be getting out of here. So much luckier than some I see that will never walk or have their sight and will have to hide themselves away from the world.

You asked where did I live in Carstairs. Well, it was not anyplace to be proud of. If you know where Vinegar Hill is and you turned off on Flowers Road it is the last house on the right, yellow paint once upon a time. My father grows potatoes, or did. I used to take them around town with my wagon, and every load I sold got a nickel to keep.

You mention favorite authors. At one time I was fond of Zane Grey, but I drifted away from reading fiction stories to reading History or Travel. I sometimes read books away over my head, I know, but I do get something out of them. H. G. Wells I mentioned is one and Robert Ingersoll who writes about religion. They have given me a lot to think about. If you are very religious I hope I have not offended you.

One day when I got to the Library it was a Saturday afternoon and you had just unlocked the door and were putting the lights on as it was dark and raining out. You had been caught out with no hat or umbrella and your hair had got wet. You took the pins out of it and let it come down. Is it too personal a thing to ask if you have it long still or have you cut it? You went over and stood by the radiator and shook your hair on it and the water sizzled like grease in the frying pan. I was sitting reading in the London Illustrated News about the War. We exchanged a smile. (I didn't mean to say your hair was greasy when I wrote that!)

I have not cut my hair though I often think about it. I do not know if it is vanity or laziness that prevents me.

I am not very religious.
I walked up Vinegar Hill and found your house. The potatoes are looking healthy. A police dog disputed with me, is he yours?

The weather is getting quite warm. We have had the flood on the river, which I gather is an annual Spring event. The water got into the hotel basement and somehow contaminated our drinking supply so that we were given free beer or ginger ale. But only if we lived or were staying there. You can imagine there were plenty of jokes.
I should ask if there is anything that I could send you.

I am not in need of anything particular. I get the tobacco and other bits of things the ladies in Carstairs do up for us. I would like to read some books by the authors you have mentioned but I doubt whether I would get the chance here.

The other day there was a man died of a heart attack. It was the News of all time. Did you hear about the man who died of a heart attack? That was all you heard about day and night here. Then everybody would laugh which seems hard-hearted but it just seemed so strange. It was not even a hot time so you couldn't say maybe he was scared. (As a matter of fact he was writing a letter at the time so I had better look out.) Before and after him others have died being shot up or blown up but he is the famous one, to die of a heart attack. Everybody is saying what a long way to come and a lot of expense for the Army to go to, for that.

The summer has been so dry the watering tank has been doing the streets every day, trying to lay the dust. The children would dance along behind it. There was also a new thing in town—a cart with a little bell that went along selling ice cream, and the children were pretty attentive to this as well. It was pushed by the man who had an accident at the factory—you know who I mean, though I can't recall his name. He lost his arm to the elbow. My room at the hotel, being on the third floor, it was like an oven, and I often walked about till after midnight. So did many other people, sometimes in pajamas. It was like a dream. There was still a little water in the river, enough to go out in a rowboat, and the Methodist minister did that on a Sunday in August. He was praying for rain in a public service. But there was a small leak in the boat and the water came in and wet his feet and eventually the boat sank and left him standing in the water, which did not nearly reach his waist. Was it an accident or a

malicious trick? The talk was all that his prayers were answered but from the wrong direction.

I often pass the Douds' place on my walks. Your father keeps the lawns and hedges looking beautiful. I like the house, so original and airy-looking. But it may not have been cool even there, because I heard the voice of the mother and baby daughter late at night as if they were out on the lawn.

Though I told you there is nothing I need, there is one thing I would like. That is a photograph of you. I hope you will not think I am overstepping the bounds to ask for it. Maybe you are engaged to somebody or have a sweetheart over here you are writing to as well as me. You are a cut above the ordinary and it would not surprise me if some Officer had spoken for you. But now that I have asked I cannot take it back and will just leave it up to you to think what you like of me.

Louisa was twenty-five years old and had been in love once, with a doctor she had known in the sanitorium. Her love was returned, eventually, costing the doctor his job. There was some harsh doubt in her mind about whether he had been told to leave the sanitorium or had left of his own accord, being weary of the entanglement. He was married, he had children. Letters had played a part that time, too. After he left, they were still writing to one another. And once or twice after she was released. Then she asked him not to write anymore and he didn't. But the failure of his letters to arrive drove her out of Toronto and made her take the travelling job. Then there would be only the one disappointment in the week, when she got back on Friday or Saturday night. Her last letter had been firm and stoical, and some consciousness of herself as a heroine of love's tragedy went with her around the country as she hauled her display cases up and down the stairs of small hotels and talked about Paris styles and said that her sample hats were bewitching, and drank her solitary glass of wine. If she'd had anybody to tell, though, she would have laughed at just that notion. She would have said love was all hocus-pocus, a deception, and she believed that. But at the prospect she still felt a hush, a flutter along the nerves, a bowing down of sense, a flagrant prostration.

She had a picture taken. She knew how she wanted it to be. She would have liked to wear a simple white blouse, a peasant girl's smock with the string open at the neck. She did not own a blouse of that description and in fact had only seen them in pictures. And she would have liked to let her hair down. Or if it had to be up, she would have liked it piled very loosely and bound with strings of pearls.

Instead she wore her blue silk shirt-waist and bound her hair as usual. She thought the picture made her look rather pale, hollow-eyed. Her expression was sterner and more fore- boding than she had intended. She sent it anyway.

I am not engaged, and do not have a sweetheart. I was in love once and it had to be broken off. I was upset at the time but I knew I must bear it, and now I believe that it was all for the best.
She had wracked her brains, of course, to remember him. She could not remember shaking out her hair, as he said she had done, or smiling at any young man when the raindrops fell on the radiator. He might as well have dreamed all that, and perhaps he had.

She had begun to follow the war in a more detailed way than she had done previously. She did not try to ignore it any-more. She went along the street with a sense that her head was filled with the same exciting and troubling information as everybody else's. Saint-Quentin, Arras, Montdidier, Amiens, and then there was a battle going on at the Somme River, where surely there had been one before? She laid open on her desk the maps of the war that appeared as double-page spreads in the magazines. She saw in colored lines the German drive to the Marne, the first thrust of the Americans at Château-Thierry. She looked at the artist's brown pictures of a horse rearing up during an air attack, of some soldiers in East Africa drinking out of coconuts, and of a line of German prisoners with bandaged heads or limbs and bleak, sullen expressions. Now she felt what everybody else did—a constant fear and misgiving and at the same time this addictive excitement. You could look up from your life of the moment and feel the world crackling beyond the walls.

I am glad to hear you do not have a sweetheart though I know that is selfish of me. I do not think you and I will ever meet again. I don't say that because I've had a dream about what will happen or am a gloomy person always looking for the worst. It just seems to me it is the most probable thing to happen, though I don't dwell on it and go along every day doing the best I can to stay alive. I am not trying to worry you or get your sympathy either but just explain how the idea I won't ever see Carstairs again makes me think I can say anything I want. I guess it's like being sick with a fever. So I will say I love you. I think of you up on a stool at the Library reaching to put a book away and I come up and put my hands on your waist and lift you down, and you turning around inside my arms as if we agreed about everything.

Every Tuesday afternoon the ladies and girls of the Red Cross met in the Council Chambers, which was just down the hall from the Library. When the Library was empty for a few moments, Louisa went down the hall and entered the room full of women. She had decided to knit a scarf. At the sanitorium she had learned how to knit a basic stitch, but she had never learned or had forgotten how to cast on or off.

The older women were all busy packing boxes or cutting up and folding bandages from sheets of heavy cotton that were spread on the tables. But a lot of girls near the door were eating buns and drinking tea. One was holding a skein of wool on her arms for another to wind.

Louisa told them what she needed to know.

"So what do you want to knit, then?" said one of the girls with some bun still in her mouth.

Louisa said, a muffler. For a soldier.

"Oh, you'll want the regulation wool," another said, more politely, and jumped off the table. She came back with some balls of brown wool, and fished a spare pair of needles out of her bag, telling Louisa they could be hers.

"I'll just get you started," she said. "It's a regulation width, too."

Other girls gathered around and teased this girl, whose name was Corrie. They told her she was doing it all wrong.

"Oh, I am, am I?" said Corrie. "How would you like a knitting needle in your eye? Is it for a friend?" she said solicitously to Louisa. "A friend overseas?"

"Yes," said Louisa. Of course they would think of her as an old maid, they would laugh at her or feel sorry for her, according to whatever show they put on, of being kind or brazen.

"So knit up good and tight," said the one who'd finished her bun. "Knit up good and tight to keep him warm!"

One of the girls in this group was Grace Horne. She was a shy but resolute-looking girl, nineteen years old, with a broad face, thin lips often pressed together, brown hair cut in a straight bang, and an attractively mature body. She had become engaged to Jack Agnew before he went overseas, but they had agreed not to say anything about it.

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Interview

Nobel Prize Talks: Alice Munro

Released 2013-12-05

"Bewildering but very pleasant." Meet Alice Munro in a talk about being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, happiness and melancholy, the intense relationship she has with her stories, and how writing and life is intertwined.

Interview, October 2013

Telephone interview with Alice Munro following the announcement of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature, 10 October 2013. The interviewer is Nobelprize.org's Adam Smith.

Interview transcript

[Adam Smith] Hello, Adam Smith.

[Alice Munro] Hello Adam!

[AS] Hello, this is Alice Munro?

[AM] Yes, this is Alice Munro. I just wanted to thank you, very much. This is quite a wonderful thing for me. It's a wonderful thing for the short story.

[AS] It is indeed, and may we congratulate you in turn. It's a wonderful day.

[AM] Thank you very, very much.

[AS] How did you hear the news?

[AM] Um, let me see, I was wandering around this morning, early. How did I hear it first? [Said to her daughter, Jenny, in the room with her] … Oh, the press called me.

[AS] And what was your first reaction? Do you remember?

[AM] Unbelief. [Laughs] I really couldn't believe it, I was so happy, and I haven't gotten over the delight yet.

[AS] You've produced an enormous body of work over four decades …

[AM] Well I have, yes. But, you know, because I work generally in the short story form, this is a special thing I think to get this recognition.

[AS] Yes indeed, yes indeed. Have you been basically the same sort of writer from the beginning to the end? Have you changed, do you think?

[AM] Well you know as far as I can tell, I have not changed very much. But someone else could answer that question better I think.

[AS] And the award will bring a great new readership to your work …

[AM] Well I would hope so, and I hope this would happen not just for me but for the short story in general. Because it's often sort of brushed off, you know, as something that people do before they write their first novel. And I would like it to come to the fore, without any strings attached, so that there doesn't have to be a novel.

[AS] And for those who don't know your work, would you recommend a starting point?

[AM] Oh goodness! I don't know, I can't … You always think that your latest work is your best, at least I do. So I would want them to start with the latest book.

[AS] So they should start with *Dear Life* should they?
[AM] Well, in a way, yes, but then I hope they would go back and read the others as well.

[AS] And of course everybody is talking about the fact that you announced earlier this year that you were going to stop writing, and saying "Maybe this will encourage her to start again".

[AM] [Laughs] Well you know I've been doing it for so many years. I've been writing and publishing, I think, since I was about twenty – just now and then I would get something published you know – but that's a long time to be working and I thought maybe it's time to take it easy. But this may change my mind. [Laughter]

[AS] That's an exciting statement! That's going to have everybody buzzing.

[Both laugh]

[AS] How splendid! So, I know that you must be tired after speaking to so many people so we would like very much to talk to you perhaps on another occasion …

[AM] That would be great, actually, because I am a little bit tired and woozy now and God knows what I might say!

[AS] [Laughs] OK, well we'll wait until this quiet down a bit, and then …

[AM] OK.

[AS] It has been a great pleasure to speak to you, thank you so very much indeed.

[AM] Thank you, goodbye.

[AS] Bye, bye.

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Podcast

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2013/munro/podcast/

Nobel Prize Conversations

"It's the insight, the work,
the way you give yourself
to the story that matters"

Listen to a heartwarming conversation with Canadian
'master of short stories' and literature laureate Alice Munro.

This conversation between the Nobel Prize's Adam Smith and Munro took place soon after she was awarded the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature. In the episode, she reflects on how she creates short stories, what these stories have meant to her and her readers and why she started writing. Munro also tells Smith what she hopes to achieve with her writing: conveying stories that resonate, as well as surprise, her readers.

The host of this podcast is nobelprize.org's Adam Smith, joined by Clare Brilliant. This podcast was first released in 2013 as part of the series 'Nobel Prize Talks' but was republished in a new format on 26 October, 2023.

Below you find a transcript of the podcast interview. The transcript was created using speech recognition software. While it has been reviewed by human transcribers, it may contain errors.

Alice Munro, Nobel Prize laureate in literature 2013.

Clare Brilliant: Welcome to Nobel Prize Conversations and this encore presentation of our December 2013 talk with literature laureate Alice Munro. I'm Claire Brilliant and I'm here with our host Adam Smith. Hi Adam.

Adam Smith: Hi.

Brilliant: We're actually about to revisit six podcasts – one from each prize category – and we're kicking off with Literature, which is the oldest podcast of the bunch at just over 10 years old. Do you even remember when you recorded this, Adam?

Smith: Oh, very much so because it was quite a coup getting this interview with Alice Munro quite soon after she'd been awarded the prize. She didn't speak often. So it was just a joy to be able to record it.

Brilliant: I think that really comes across in re-listening to the episode. In getting ready for this season we've been re-listening to quite a few of the upcoming episodes and we've seen how some conversations like this one have just aged very well. It feels so timeless. Why do you think this conversation was so good?

Smith: Partly because I think it was a conversation. You know, these Nobel Prize conversations sometimes they're more conversational than other times when they're a bit more interview-y. This one did feel like we'd somehow achieved that nirvana of proper conversation. Also because she's dealing really with the subject of writing the short story.

Brilliant: I liked how she said that she saw the prize as a vindication, something that could make people like her who take short stories feel comforted. I really liked the way she described that.

Smith: I think one of the things about this conversation that I like is that she didn't talk often about her writing her process. It seems to me that to a certain extent she's also discovering things about herself in it. Maybe that's saying too much, but she seems excited about talking about it and some of the things she says seem to excite her. That's nice.

Brilliant: There were so many parts of this conversation when she described her process in such appealing ways. Another element that I remembered was how when she was younger when she was writing, she was more melancholy than when she was older. The way she described that was really interesting, I thought.

Smith: Yes, it's hopeful that one gets happier as one gets older. That's true.

Brilliant: So, I think it's time to get started now.

Smith: Absolutely. Yes, let's go back to those days and weeks just after Alice Munro had been awarded a Nobel Prize in 2013 and listen to this encore presentation of Nobel Prize Conversation.

Alice Munro: Hello.

Smith: It must have been a quite bewildering nu a few weeks since the prize was awarded.

Munro: Bewildering, but very, very pleasant. Very nice.

Smith: That's nice to hear because you are notoriously quite a reserved person who doesn't expose yourself to the media very much.

Munro: Well, probably not, but I'm really not quite a dragon. I'm quite and can be quite happy,

Smith: That's nice. So have you actually enjoyed then the attention that the prize has brought?

Munro: I have enjoyed the whole thing. It's wonderful in it's just not necessarily this fact of me getting it as much as the whole thing. There is such a feeling, everybody who's come to see me about it and it's feeling of the importance of well, of the arts and that, that people are so interested and they're so delightful to me. There's a feeling that just that you've done the right thing.

Smith: It must be very nice to have that kind of app probation once in your life for me.

Munro: That is it. And because, you go for a long time with writing, just wondering what you're doing and how it's working and things like that. And you love finding out that it's worked well.

Smith: And you were at pains to say on the day of the announcement that you saw this as a prize not only for yourself, but also for the short story.

Munro: Oh, very much so. All that I've written, and when I began to write short stories, there was not a very good feeling about it. It was something that you were supposed to sort of cut your teeth on until you got big and brave enough to write a novel. And so I knew I wasn't probably going to write a novel. I wanted very much to do short stories, and I went, oh, I'm doing them, but I see this as a vindication. I see it as something that, as that made people who like me want to take short stories seriously made them feel comforted and to feel that it's something you could work at seriously your whole life.

Smith: I'm sure that this isn't an easy question to answer, but why did you specifically want to write short stories rather than moving to longer forms?

Munro: Well, I think it was because when I started to write, I was a young housewife and mother and I could not look ahead to doing a great deal of, though I know lots of housewives do write novels, I couldn't seem to, to fit it in that way. Then I started writing short stories, thinking I would just do this for a while. Then I became so interested in the style itself that it became not an idea that you were doing until you grew up and wrote novels, but something that I never tired of doing, and I wanted to do it so much. To have that recognised is just wonderful for me.

Smith: Do you think of it as a sort of, I mean, it's a fragmentary form, I suppose, so is it a fragmentary form which is well suited to a society which is becoming more atomised, less unified?

Munro: Perhaps that's true, though. I don't think of it necessary as fragmentary. I would think of it just as maybe condensed in a way, but given enormous importance in not very large space. And that's what I particularly like about it. I like the glow you can get from a story. It's a kind of shock to your system, a good shock and sometimes a frightening shock, but something that you can do with a short story in a very strong way that isn't as easy in a longer piece of writing or isn't possible. I think they're very different forms, but I like very much working in the story form, so I write rather long stories.

Smith: Is that partly what you're setting out to do, you're setting out to arrest people, to shock them?

Munro: Perhaps shock is the wrong word, but yes. To arrest them, to surprise them, to make them think of something a little different from that perhaps that they started out thinking of the way the story was going. Something like that. No, I'm not a tall didactic as a writer, so I don't wanna sound that way. I just want them to be surprises.

Smith: Are they also surprises for you? Do you know what the surprises are going to…

Munro: Be? Oh, goodness, yes. That's what I like. I like very much to find out that what I was writing about does not turn out to be the main thing I was writing about and have to start again because I find things in myself and in the work I'm doing first in myself and then in the work I'm doing. And this will surprise me sometimes.

Smith: So when you are writing, are you writing for yourself alone for yourself and the audience alone?

Munro: I think I'm writing for myself alone in the beginning. I am. And then, of course, I want other people to read it because I do like communication very much, but I want just something that I think is worth communicating and that's where the work comes in.

Smith: So you are the stories you write, of course, they're published individually, I mean, especially for instance in places like the New Yorker, but then they're collected into these volumes. Do you have the collection in mind as you are writing and creating?

Munro: No, not at all. I never can see further than the novel I'm working on. And then, towards the end, I'll have a batch of stories and I will see them that there's something about them that they're, there's not a very large similarity about them, but there's something in them that shows what I was thinking at the time and that I maybe really didn't even know was there. But it is important then that they go together, but they don't go together while I'm working on them.

Smith: Where do you write?

Munro: Oh, well, in the house somewhere. I was starting writing when I had small children, and so I wrote when they were having their naps, and I would be at probably just sitting in a chair, a comfortable chair and writing by hand. After a while, I started learning to type for quite a long time. I didn't have a special place to work, and I wrote when I could. Then I got a place that became much more certain about doing it.

Smith: Did the place help in making you a more confident writer?

Munro: No, I vary between wild enthusiasm and great doubts. That never stops,

Smith: Really?

Munro: Then you try to overcome the doubts, mind you don't just get satisfied with them.

Smith: You still, as a writer feel doubt about what, what is the doubt?

Munro: Heavens yes.

Smith: What's the doubt about?

Munro: Doubt is about whether I can translate this story that I see in my head with all the changes and the things that are half hidden, and can I get this through to the person who is reading the story? And I can't explain any further than. It doesn't mean that I make the story more or less elaborate. I just try to make it, well, I make it clearer to myself. I more and more see what I want to say, and then I work at saying it.

Smith: So are you surrounded by sort of by sheaves of notes of stories that have begun and not been finished? Or do you tend to finish it?

Munro: No, no. I usually, if I, if I see that the story isn't going well, I usually just throw it out and I might come back to it much later having seen some value in it. But if I worked at a story, say for a week, and the story isn't kind of doing its job for me, I get rid of it, forget about it, find another, that's why stories are a lot more or less intense maybe than novels. Do you think so?

Smith: Yes. That, yes. That again, that makes perfect sense. You don't have the sort of burden of a long-term relationship.

Munro: That sounds like marriage. But anyway, what I mean is, it's not that I'm not working hard enough, but it's that there's something that in me is resisting the story

because maybe I, at heart, don't like it. I don't like it for some, maybe for a certain glibness about it. This can be a problem with stories. And maybe because it doesn't have the mystery I want or just the sense of involvement I want. Like if you start a story, which I don't anymore, just because, you know, you say, well, I think that would make a good story, it generally doesn't work, and I just stop it because it has to have that feeling. That excites me a lot. I have to be excited by

Smith: It's very nice. I mean, again, it sounds like a very intense relationship you have with this.

Munro: It is very intense.

Smith: I hadn't sort of thought I might ask this question, but given that you mentioned that you give it a week to sort of prove itself. How long does it take to write a story? Can you answer that?

Munro: Oh, it can be any length of tall. I think the shortest might be a month or six, you know. But often I will go back to a story and I will think I have finished the story. This isn't when I've given up a story, but when I have finished a story and just put it away, I maybe even sent it to a publisher. And then I think, oh, I know what should be done with that to make it better. And I will have thought that it was as good as it could be, but I will haul it out and I will haul it back from the publisher, and I will fool around with it some more. And sometimes the people who are printing the story don't think this is particularly necessary, but I've gotten them mostly so they'll do it anyway. I sound like a tired.

Smith: So as the story moves from being, if you like, your possession to being other people's possession, do you start to think of particular readers?

AMunro: No, no, I never think of readers as a particular kind of readers. I guess what I think is, if people like my stories and not everybody does if people like my stories and, and I've done the best I could with it, they're going to like this one. Because I find too, maybe in the stories that I, other people's stories I don't like other people's stories all the same. But in general, if I like what they're doing, I'm going to like pretty well the way they've done it.

Smith: That I suppose begs the question of whether you feel your voice has been pretty much the same throughout your writing career?

Munro: I think so, yes. I think it's been the same, but I've been in the way that I've been the same person. But, as a person, you do change. I think that's what's happened maybe with my stories, oddly enough. I think that in the beginning I was much more melancholy…

Smith: Mm-Hmm.

Munro: …than later because, and I think maybe a lot of us are like that.

Smith: Is that a reflection of you as a person? Were you more melancholy then, or is it just the way you wrote?

Munro: No, I think it was a characteristic of youth.

Smith: Yes.

Munro: Not necessarily anything I knew I was doing, but just that you're apt to see things that way. Then later on when you've seen a few things that may actually make you very melancholy, you could kind of cheer up a bit.

Smith: True.

Munro: Sorry about this.

Smith: It's not nonsense at all I think, but do you think writing gets easier as you get older?

Munro: I think a certain kind of facility gets easier. I'm not sure that that you know and facility is not enough. So I'm not sure that writing gets any easier at all. The only thing that gets easier is the fact that you've done this before. You've felt that something wasn't working. You've been in despair about something much earlier in your life, and you've done it all your life. The despair has in general, changed to something that you could be more or less satisfied with. So I think as you're older, you get to know that will probably happen and you don't feel in such utter despair. But I'm not promising anything. Despair is still around.

Smith: But I suppose then that's just, as in writing as in life, that what you just

Munro: Said? Yeah. Very much. Yes.

Smith: In fact, have you found that life is easier as you get older or maybe even happier as you get older?

Munro: I think it's happier, but I think partly that's been because I've been lucky.

Smith: Mm-Hmm.

Munro: I don't know if there's any general rules about this. There are certain things that can happen to people that make it very difficult to maintain any kind of happiness.

Smith: Sure. But I suppose quite a lot of older people say things say that one worries less about life as you get

Munro: Older. That's what I think one worries less. But I think a lot depends on, I haven't had a very unhappy life. I haven't had big terrible things happen to me. This is partly even because of the chances of living in a country that's been fairly comfortable. So that the outside things are not as ap to interfere with and hurt you but other things can come, but you've just didn't expect.

Smith: In your stories you write quite a lot about very disagreeable things happening to people. You explore that territory.

Munro: Disagreeable, yes. By saying that terrible things haven't happened. I mean, that I haven't been in major wars, the kind of things from outside that come at us and that I have lived in a fairly comfortable country my whole life. That's what I meant. But the things that can come from inside from a person's fear of themselves or of their lack of what should I say, lack of confidence that you can have lack of confidence, even though you may live in a very nice, confident country. You can have all kinds of personal problems at that. You're going to get in the way of, and these are one of the interesting things to write, I think not, I mean, not to write stories that are depressing. I don't feel I do that. But stories that get into the unexpected, the lonely, the personal under what's under the surface, and this I think can be not so much by what cabins to you in your life, is just what kind of person you are. When I was a little girl, I read the story of Hans Christian Anderson, do you know that story where the princess turns into a…

Smith: Mermaid? The little mermaid.

Munro: The mermaid? Yes, yes, yes. It was so sad I couldn't bear it. I walked around and around in the garden and made up a happier story that had a happy ending on the princess and I forget just how it is. But anyway, she got the man, the Prince. It took me quite a while to realise that I had just done this in my own story. It wasn't therefore changed in the world. I think you come to something like that you can't, there are things you can't change or do anything about, and that's when the writing gets quite important to you and intense in a way that has not to do so much with reception or other people, but just what you get, what you find in yourself.

Smith: It seems like it's quite a brave thing to go into yourself and find that side of life.

Munro: Yes. I know I'm not saying this very well, but I think you know what I mean.

Smith: It's very clear. What do you mean? On this sort of idea of the bravery of it, I mean, these are, as a word I used earlier, disagreeable things to tackle, but it's disagreeable for most people to think about such things. In a way, one tries to escape thinking about such things. So it's interesting to me that you constantly revisit it. Do you do it because you have a responsibility to expose this?

Munro: Oh no, I never feel responsibility. I mean, not in that way. I feel responsibilities in my life, but not in my writing. I feel that this is what interests me. This is me, this is what I want to say I've felt, or something like this. It's as if you only have, as you go through life, the only thing you can be sure of, or at least partially sure of is yourself and what you have felt and what you have done, and what you would do differently now and et cetera. But I don't like a tall fiction that is written to make people change or become better people. I just like it to be, I would like the fiction to make a people start and say, oh, yes, that's true, or that's just what I thought.

Smith: Just the last question about these, the less pleasant sides of life that one writes about, you don't pass judgment. Are you tempted to sometimes on your characters?

Munro: No. Heavens no.

Smith: Perhaps we could talk a little bit about your early life. Were you always a storyteller as a child?

Munro: Oh, yes, but I only told the stories to myself just walking around and around. I had a fairly long walk to school, which was a time for stories. A lot of them were about myself and my interesting future when I grew up

Smith: And you never shared them with anybody?

Munro: Oh, goodness, no.

Smith: Did they keep you happy?

Munro: Yes. Yes. They were extremely comforting.

Smith: So they were happy stories in general.

Munro: Oh, yes. Yes. There were stories of considerable success. Maybe in the movie star line.

Smith: What were your literary influences as a child?

Munro: Oh, well, I suppose the we have a series of stories in Canada that are called the Anna Green Gables Stories. These are about a little orphan girl growing up. Another stories would be the Hans Christian Anderson stories. Just about anything I could get my hands of real on really what became an important story. I read a child's history of England, which was as it says, a history of England written for children by, I think it was Dickens. I loved those stories, and I reread them and sometimes reframed them with myself as a hero rather than the person in the story.

Smith: They're quite gruesome, those histories.

Munro: Very gruesome. That didn't bother me at all.

Smith: Maybe even that's part of the appeal to children.

Munro: I think so. And there were of course, dreadful things happening in them. People often got their heads chopped. And this was for some misdemeanor or other, but if I really liked my hero in the story, I didn't get her head chopped off. I made this, I changed the story so that that wouldn't happen.

Smith: Somehow these happy stories in your head changed into more realistic stories that started to be written down. You said that happened when you had children?

Munro: Oh, I think it really happened before I had children. I was working at stories when I was in high school, and I did a shortened version of Pier gimp when I was at university. This was for a school production, a university production. I was doing a lot of things like that were sort of official stories that were real stories, not stories that I had made up, but I sometimes changed them. I shortened them so that we could do them in a play or something like that.

Smith: I suppose it's when you started writing about life around you.

Munro: Yes, that would've happened when I was about, well, I got married when I was around 20-21. Then life around me became inescapable.

Smith: That's a very good phrase.

Smith: People frequently compare you to Chekhov. That is partly, of course, because you share a love of this short story. But it's partly, because you are both in a way, sort of pickers up of Unconsidered trifolds. I wonder, do you spend a lot of your time observing small events and thinking how they might expand into stories?

Munro: I don't spend my time doing that with any conscious design, but I just do it naturally all the time. I mean what I see around me.

Smith: Would you say you were more observant than other people of these things?

Munro: Oh, yes. I think I got to be, but one of the reasons was falling in love with Chekhov, which I did probably when I was 16-17 years old. Not consciously copying, but thinking of what you could do with life and what you could do with story life. I think Chekhov was a revelation to me.

Smith: What would you say was the magic of Chekhov for you?

Munro: The extreme importance he would give to ordinary life, the dignity he gave to such people, people who generally didn't get into stories. I think the kindness, there's a wonderful mercy in Chekhov as if everybody is worthwhile.

Smith: Would you say that it is important to recognise people's efforts?

Munro: Oh, yes. Yes.

Smith: Pathetically miserable.

Munro: Yes, yes. People's own interpretation of what they're doing compared to what other people may think or just the constant changes and just the interest of how people get through.

Smith: In a way, throughout all these decades of writing, you've been documenting the world around you.

Munro: I suppose you could say that, yes.

Smith: Sometimes people speak about a sort of photographic element in your work. Do you like the world you see around you more or less than you used to?

Munro: I really can't answer to that because there are so many ways in which the world has changed. If you are my age, and I see things around me that are just so much more tolerant, give the individual so much ease compared to what I grew up in. So I'm naturally happy with that, but that isn't really what I'm talking about when I write stories. I'm still writing stories, which are about problems that people have to solve in some way, or that they try to leave a alone or something. That really doesn't change much, although the exact happenings might change if you live together with your lover unmarried. Obviously that's something that has changed from being an absolutely amazingly horrible thing to being very commonplace. Things like that have changed, but I don't think the major problems that people have in their getting along in life, getting along with other people or with their own emotions those haven't changed. They're just in different wrappings now, sort of.

Smith: Now you are very much viewed as a Canadian writer yes. But what does the description Canadian writer mean to you?

Munro: It means writing by anything. Who lives in everybody who lives in Canada? That's all. I think when people use it they may use it for all kinds of things. Maybe for the fact that maybe my focus is on Canadians more definitely than that. It started out definitely because when I was young, I never knew anybody who wasn't a Canadian. My life was not structured in that way, that I saw many people who were very different from the people I knew around me. So I started writing people who knew around me, and maybe I still feel that those are the people I know, and I know more deeply.

Smith: Have you ever wanted to be anything other than a Canadian writer?

Munro: No, I haven't been because I could see more material there than I could ever live to write about. One doesn't, I didn't think of any other of going of a need to go anywhere else or try to take on other things that I should learn about. Perhaps. I do this in my real life. In my real life, I don't stick to Canadian people or Canadian friends or Canadian life in any particular way. But when I write about it, that's what I can write about and know that I'm not being shallow, and it's important not to be shallow.

Smith: Do you think the setting matters? Do you think that actually the fundamental aspects of getting through life that you talk about would be the same if you were writing about a French group of people?

Munro: I think there'd be a great deal that was similar. I think a lot of superficial things would seem the same, and even some moral things or manners might seem different, but there would be a basic sameness. For instance, when I started reading Russian when I was fairly, not the Russian language, but Russian stories when I was very young. I found there a great sympathy with the Canadian stories that I was reading, although the incidents might not be very different.

Smith: What about the language you use?

Munro: Language is a tool, and it was what I started with. I still work with, but not all the time. I do write with now with a feeling for different classes of people, which does give what does give you changes in language, which are important.

Smith: There's a sort of sparseness or a sort of…

Munro: Oh, yes. I'd say the sparseness was not particularly conscious. I don't sit down and say, I will write a very sparse novel. I write, but just the way I see as most effective.

Smith: I suppose as a non-Canadian, I might say that it was a rather Canadian way of being. It's a indeed to the point, straightforward.

Munro: Mm-Hmm.

Smith: Do you like that idea that that's how Canadians speak?

Munro: No, not necessarily. It's not a matter of liking, it's a matter of being able to get out as much feeling and understanding as seriousness as I can. I suppose that I would do that in a language that seems most workable in that way.

Smith: I wanted to ask a little bit more about how you write.

Munro: Okay.

Smith: How do you inhabit a story? How do you populate it?

Munro: That's an interesting question, but I don't know the answer. I just start thinking about the people in it and I think I get to see them and hear them and want to know more about them. There will be a connection here sometimes by the story in my mind and the people that I have observed in my life. But I tend to put those things together in a way that I'm not writing about anybody in real life, and I'm inventing a kind of person that I will write about, but this person is always based on certain realities that have intrigued me.

Smith: Then as you structure the story. Is there a sequence to it? Does it flow as it would in the story as you build it? Or do you see the end?

Munro: That's a very good question, because it starts in a way that almost any old way at all that I can get into it, and I get into it. Then I often do make changes in the way the story happens in the language. And not just in the language, but in what happens in the story and how the reader comes across what happens.

Smith: It must be, in some ways, difficult to limit the story,

Munro: Sometimes it is, sometimes not. But yes, I've tended to write sometimes quite long stories that we're almost, I didn't have a name for really. They just demanded, I didn't think I will write a long story. I just found that what I was writing about demanded these characters and this time, and it just became a long story.

Smith: Many of your characters and the people at the center of your stories are women.

Munro: Mm-Hmm.

Smith: Maybe an obvious question, but why is that?

Munro: I suppose it's because I am a woman and I know things about women's lives, and maybe I'm more interested because of what I know and what I see has happened, what I see, what women do in certain situations. I know that males write about women sometimes very convincingly, but not always. There are great classics where I think the female characters are not very believable. So you could say, I'm writing against that.

Smith: Is it a conscious effort to portray women, or is it just a natural?

Munro: Oh, goodness, no. Goodness. No, because that's the world I live in and have for my life. So it isn't it sometimes I write about a male character, though whom I

know very well, and I don't feel at all that there's no essential difference in writing about a male character. It might just be that in certain areas, I'm less well versed.

Smith: I suppose that raises the question of is it more fun to write about a character you know or a character who you feel you don't know so well?

Munro: That is impossible to answer because it's more fun with any story that is really going well. What I'm trying to say is it doesn't matter the gender. If it's just something that I feel I really know the character and who the paces I put the character through are very interesting.

Smith: Do you consider yourself to be a female writer or just a writer?

Munro: A writer. Because I think these things we've been talking about the differences in what you write about don't matter a great deal. It's the insight, the work, the way you give yourself to the story that matters.

Smith: Can you expand on that a bit more?

Munro: When I say give yourself to the story, that means that you don't just do what is easy or what might have first occurred to you. You let the characters develop and you see that this person is acting in a certain way. Now that sounds a bit silly, because of course, everything that's going on is going on in my head, but when it's really working, it's working in that way that you have to be to make the story any good. You have to be very truthful about your characters. You have to let them do what they really would do, rather than something that the reader might want them to do sometimes, if that makes any sense.

Smith: Yes, it does. It absolutely does. But that indicates that you are really creating a world in which they are free agents operating, and you are observing them.

Munro: Pretty much, yes. I don't want to say things like that because it sounds a bit white but I'm a straightforward Canadian woman but, but yeah, sort of like that.

Smith: The future, you mentioned in the call on the day of the announcement that the Nobel Prize might induce you to start writing again.

Munro: Did I say that?

Smith: You did.

Munro: I was crazy. Of course it might, you never know, but I began to feel that I'd done my best work. I felt that the energy wasn't in me anymore. As long as that is true, I will not try. But if it came back of course I would try, but I'm just not sure if that ever happening.

Smith: Without the end point of putting them down on paper. Are you still creating the stories in your head?

Munro: Not recently, because I haven't had time, but that's a very good question, Because if I'm not collecting them in my head, then it would be the first time since I was five years old. I expect that maybe I will start, I'm not right now because life is very intense and busy around me. But maybe that's going to change. I don't know.

Smith: Those who want you to start writing again, of whom there are many, should absolutely leave you alone?

Munro: Oh, yes, they should.

Smith: Okay. Well, that's a good signature. That's a good sign for me to stop. It's been an enormous pleasure speaking to you, and I thank you very much indeed.

Munro: Glad. Okay, thank you very much. Bye-Bye.

Smith: Bye-Bye.

This podcast was presented by Nobel Prize Conversations. If you'd like to know more about Alice Munro, you can go to nobelprize.org. where you'll find a wealth of information about the prizes and the people behind the discoveries.
Nobel Prize Conversations is a podcast series with Adam Smith, a co-production of FILT and Nobel Prize Outreach. The producer for Nobel Prize Talks was Magnus Gylje. The editorial team for this encore production includes Andrew Hart, Olivia Lundqvist and me, Clare Brilliant. Music by Epidemic Sound. You can find previous seasons and conversations on ACAST or wherever you listen to podcasts. Thanks for listening.

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Bio-bibliography

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

10 October 2013

Biobibliographical Notes

Alice Munro was born on the 10th of July, 1931 in Wingham, which is in the Canadian province of Ontario. Her mother was a teacher, and her father was a fox farmer. After finishing high school, she began studying journalism and English at the University of Western Ontario, but broke off her studies when she got married in 1951. Together with her husband, she settled in Victoria, British Columbia, where the couple opened a bookstore. Munro started writing stories in her teens, but published her first book-length work in 1968, the story collection *Dance of the Happy Shades*, which received considerable attention in Canada. She had begun publishing in various magazines from the beginning of the 1950's. In 1971 she published a collection of stories entitled *Lives of Girls and Women*, which critics have described as a *Bildungsroman*.

Munro is primarily known for her short stories and has published many collections over the years. Her works include *Who Do You Think You Are*? (1978), *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), *Runaway* (2004), *The View from Castle Rock* (2006) and *Too Much Happiness* (2009). The collection *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001) became the basis of the film *Away from Her* from 2006, directed by Sarah Polley. Her most recent collection is *Dear Life* (2012).

Munro is acclaimed for her finely tuned storytelling, which is characterized by clarity and psychological realism. Some critics consider her a Canadian Chekhov. Her stories are often set in small town environments, where the struggle for a socially acceptable existence often results in strained relationships and moral conflicts – problems that stem from generational differences and colliding life ambitions. Her texts often feature depictions of everyday but decisive events, epiphanies of a kind, that illuminate the surrounding story and let existential questions appear in a flash of lightning.

Alice Munro currently resides in Clinton, near her childhood home in southwestern Ontario.

Major works in English

Dance of the Happy Shades and Other Stories. – Toronto : Ryerson, 1968
Lives of Girls and Women. – Toronto : McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1971
Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You : *Thirteen Stories*. – Toronto : McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974
Who Do You Think You Are? : *Stories*. – Toronto : Macmillan of Canada, 1978. – Note: also published as *The Beggar Maid* : *Stories of Flo and Rose*. – New York : Knopf, 1979
The Moons of Jupiter : *Stories*. – Toronto : Macmillan of Canada, 1982
The Progress of Love. – Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1986
Friend of My Youth : *Stories*. – Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1990
Open Secrets : *Stories*. – Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1994
The Love of a Good Woman : *Stories*. – Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1998

Queenie : *A Story*. – London : Profile Books/London Review of Books, 1999
Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage : *Stories*. – Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 2001
Runaway : *Stories*. – Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 2004
The View from Castle Rock : *Stories*. – Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 2006
Away from Her. – New York : Vintage, 2007. – Note: contains the short story "The Bear Came Over The Mountain" which was later made into the motion picture *Away from her*
Too Much Happiness : *Stories*. – Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 2009
Dear Life : *Stories*. – Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 2012

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Carried Away : *A Selection of Stories*. – New York : Knopf, 2006
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New Selected Stories. – London : Chatto & Windus, 2011

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Les lunes de Jupiter : *nouvelles* / traduit de l'anglais par Colette Tonge. – Paris : Albin Michel, 1989. – Traduction de : The Moons of Jupiter
Miles city, Montana / traduit de l'anglais par Florence Petry et Jean-Pierre Ricard. – Paris : Deuxtemps Tierce, 1991. – Traduction de : The Progress of Love
Amie de ma jeunesse : *nouvelles* / traduit de l'anglais par Marie-Odile Fortier-Masek. – Paris : Albin Michel, 1992. – Traduction de : Friend of my Youth
Secrets de Polichinelle : *nouvelles* / traduit de l'anglais (Canada) par Céline Schwaller-Balaÿ. – Paris : Rivages, 1995. – Traduction de : Open Secrets
L'amour d'une honnête femme : *nouvelles* / traduit de l'anglais (Canada) par Geneviève Doze. – Paris : Payot et Rivages, 2001. – Traduction de : The Love of a Good Woman
La danse des ombres heureuses : *nouvelles*/ traduit de l'anglais (Canada) par Geneviève Doze. – Paris : Payot et Rivages, 2002
Un demi-pamplemousse : *nouvelles* / traduit de l'anglais (Canada) par Michèle Causse. – Paris : Payot & Rivages, 2002
Un peu, beaucoup, pas du tout / traduit de l'anglais (Canada) par Geneviève Doze. – Paris : Payot et Rivages, 2004. – Traduction de : Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage
Loin d'elle / traduit de l'anglais (Canada) par Geneviève Doze. – Paris : Payot & Rivages, 2007
Fugitives / traduit de l'anglais (Canada) par Jacqueline Huet et Jean-Pierre Carasso. – Paris : Olivier. 2008. – Traduction de : Runaway
Du côté de Castle Rock / traduit de l'anglais (Canada) par Jacqueline Huet et Jean-Pierre Carasso. – Paris : Olivier, 2009. – Traduction de : The View from Castle Rock
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Jupiters månar : *noveller* / översättning av Karin Benecke. – Stockholm : Norstedt, 1985. – Orig:s titel: The Moons of Jupiter
Kärlekens vägar : *noveller* / översättning av Karin Benecke. – Stockholm : Norstedt, 1991. – Orig:s titel: The Progress of Love
Äpplen eller apelsiner : *noveller* / översättning av Karin Benecke. – Stockholm : Norstedt, 1993. – Orig:s titel: Friend of my Youth
Kärlek, vänskap, hat : *noveller* / översättning av Rose-Marie Nielsen. – Stockholm : Wahlström & Widstrand, 2003. – Orig:s titel: Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage
Nära hem / översättning: Karin Benecke. – Stockholm : Atlas, 2009. – Urval ur: Progress of Love; Moons of Jupiter; Friend of my Youth
För mycket lycka / översättning: Rose-Marie Nielsen. – Stockholm : Atlas, 2010. – Orig:s titel: Too Much Happiness
Brinnande livet / översättning: Rose-Marie Nielsen. – Stockholm : Atlas, 2013. – Orig:s titel: Dear life
Tiggarflickan / översättning : Karin Benecke. – Ny utg. – Stockholm : Atlas, 2013. – Orig:s titel: The Beggar Maid

Works in Spanish

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El progreso del amor / versión castellana de Flora Casas. – Madrid : Debate, 1990. – Título original: The Progress of Love
Amistad de juventud / traducción de Esperanza Pérez Moreno. – Barcelona : Versal, 1991. – Título original: Friend of My Youth
Secretos a voces / versión castellana de Flora Casas. – Madrid : Debate, 1996. – Título original: Open Secrets
El amor de una mujer generosa : relatos / traducción de Javier Alfaya Bula, José Hamad, Javier Alfaya McShane. – Madrid : Siglo XXI de España, 2002. – Título original: The Love of a Good Woman
Odio, amistad, noviazgo, amor, matrimonio / traducción de Marcelo Cohen. – Barcelona : RBA, 2003. – Título original: Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage
Escapada / traducción de Carmen Aguilar. – Barcelona : RBA, 2005. – Título original: Runaway
La vista desde Castle Rock / traducción de Isabel Ferrer y Carlos Milla. – Barcelona : RBA, 2008. – Título original: The View from Castle Rock
Demasiada felicidad / traducción de Flora Casas. – Barcelona : Lumen, 2010. – Título original: Too Much Happiness
La vida de las mujeres / traducción de Aurora Echevarría. – Barcelona : Lumen, 2011. – Título original: Lives of Girls and Women
Mi vida querida / traducción de Eugenia Vázquez Nacarino. – Barcelona : Lumen, 2013. – Título original: Dear Life

Works in German

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Kleine Aussichten : *ein Roman von Mädchen und Frauen* / Aus dem Amerikan. übers. von Hildegard Petry. – Stuttgart : Klett-Cotta, 1983. – Originaltitel: Lives of Girls and Women

Die Jupitermonde : *Erzählungen* / Aus dem Amerikan. übers. von Manfred Ohl und Hans Sartorius. – Stuttgart : Klett-Cotta, 1986. – Originaltitel: The Moons of Jupiter

Der Mond über der Eisbahn : *Liebesgeschichten* / Aus dem Amerikan. übers. von Helga Huisgen. – Stuttgart : Klett-Cotta, 1989. – Originaltitel: The Progress of Love

Glaubst du, es war Liebe? : *Erzählungen* / Aus dem Engl. übers. von Karen Nölle-Fischer. – Stuttgart : Klett-Cotta, 1991. – Originaltitel: Friend of my Youth

Offene Geheimnisse : *Erzählungen* / Aus dem Engl. von Karen Nölle-Fischer. – Stuttgart : Klett-Cotta, 1996. – Originaltitel: Open Secrets

Die Liebe einer Frau : *drei Erzählungen und ein kurzer Roman* / Aus dem Engl. von Heidi Zerning. – Frankfurt am Main : S. Fischer, 2000. – Originaltitel: The Love of a Good Woman

Der Traum meiner Mutter : *Erzählungen* / Aus dem Engl. von Heidi Zerning. – Frankfurt am Main : S. Fischer, 2002

Himmel und Hölle : *neun Erzählungen* / Aus dem Engl. von Heidi Zerning. – Frankfurt am Main : S. Fischer, 2004. – Originaltitel: Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage

Tricks : *acht Erzählungen* / Aus dem Engl. von Heidi Zerning. – Frankfurt am Main : S. Fischer, 2006. – Originaltitel: Runaway

Wozu wollen Sie das wissen? : *elf Erzählungen* / Aus dem Engl. von Heidi Zerning. – Frankfurt am Main : S. Fischer, 2008. – Originaltitel: The View from Castle Rock

Der Bär kletterte über den Berg : *drei Dreiecksgeschichten* / Aus dem Engl. von Heidi Zerning. – Berlin : Wagenbach, 2008

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Zu viel Glück : *zehn Erzählungen* / Aus dem Engl. von Heidi Zerning. – Frankfurt am Main : S. Fischer, 2011. – Originaltitel: Too Much Happiness

Was ich dir schon immer sagen wollte : *dreizehn Erzählungen* / Aus dem Engl. von Heidi Zerning. – Zürich : Dörlemann, 2012. – Originaltitel: Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You

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The Art of Alice Munro : *Saying the Unsayable* : *Papers From the Waterloo Conference* / edited by Judith Miller. – Waterloo, Ont. : University of Waterloo Press, 1984

Martin, W. R., *Alice Munro* : *Paradox and Parallel*. – Edmonton, Alta. : University of Alberta Press, 1986

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Carrington, Ildikó de Papp, *Controlling the Uncontrollable* : *The Fiction of Alice Munro*. – DeKalb : Northern Illinois University Press, 1989

Rasporich, Beverly Jean, *Dance of the Sexes* : *Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro*. – Edmonton, Alta. : University of Alberta Press, 1990

Redekop, Magdalene, *Mothers and Other Clowns* : *The Stories of Alice Munro*. – London: Routledge, 1992

Carscallen, James, *The Other Country* : *Patterns in the Writing of Alice Munro*. – Toronto : ECW Press, 1993

Heble, Ajay, *The Tumble of Reason* : *Alice Munro's Discourse of Absence*. – Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1994
Howells, Coral Ann, *Alice Munro*. – Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1998
The Rest of the Story : *Critical Essays on Alice Munro* / edited by Robert Thacker. – Toronto : ECW Press, 1999
Munro, Sheila, *Lives of Mothers & Daughters* : *Growing Up With Alice Munro*. – Toronto : McClelland & Stewart, 2001
Thacker, Robert, *Munro* : *Writing Her Lives* : *a Biography*. – Toronto : Douglas Gibson, 2005
Mazur, Carol, *Alice Munro* : *An Annotated Bibliography of Works and Criticism* / compiled by Carol Mazur ; edited by Cathy Moulder. – Lanham, Md. : Scarecrow Press, 2007
Hooper, Brad, *The Fiction of Alice Munro* : *An Appreciation*. – Westport, Conn. : Praeger, 2008
Skagert, Ulrica, *Possibility-Space and Its Imaginative Variations in Alice Munro's Short Stories*. – Stockholm : Stockholm University, 2008
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Duncan, Isla, *Alice Munro's Narrative Art*. – New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011
Alice Munro / Charles E. May, editor. – Ipswich, Mass. : Salem Press, 2013

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Press Release

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

The Permanent Secretary
Press release
10 October 2013

The Nobel Prize in Literature 2013
Alice Munro

The Nobel Prize in Literature for 2013 is awarded to the Canadian author Alice Munro

"master of the contemporary short story".
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Awards and Honors

- **1968**: Governor General's Literary Award for English language fiction for *Dance of the Happy Shades*
- **1971**: Canadian Booksellers Award for *Lives of Girls and Women*
- **1977:** Canada-Australia Literary Prize, inaugural priz
- **1978**: Governor General's Literary Award for English language fiction for *Who Do You Think You Are?*
- **1980**: Booker Prize for Fiction (shortlisted) for *Who Do You Think You Are?* (as *The Beggar Maid*)
- **1982**: Nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award for English language fiction for *The Moons of Jupiter*
- **1986**: Governor General's Literary Award for English language fiction for *The Progress of Love*
- **1986**: Writers' Trust of Canada's Marian Engel Award for her body of work
- **1990**: Trillium Book Award for *Friend of My Youth*
- **1991**: Commonwealth Writers Prize for Canada and the Caribbean Region shortlisted for *Friend of My Youth*
- **1994**: Governor General's Award for *Open Secrets*
- **1994:** Trillium Book Award, English nomination for *Open Secrets*
- **1994**: WH Smith Literary Award for *Open Secrets*
- **1995**: Lannan Literary Award for Fiction
- **1996**: Trillium Book Award, English nomination for *Selected Stories*
- **1997**: PEN/Malamud Award
- **1998**: Giller Prize nomination for *The Love of a Good Woman*
- **1998**: National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction for *The Love of a Good Woman*
- **1998:** Trillium Book Award, English for *The Love of a Good Woman*
- **1999**: Libris Award for Author of the Year
- **1999**: Libris Award for Fiction Book of the Year for *The Love of a Good Woman*[88]
- **2001**: Rea Award for the Short Story
- **2001**: Trillium Book Award, English nomination for *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*
- **2002**: Commonwealth Writers Prize for Canada and the Caribbean Region shortlisted for *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*
- **2002**: Giller Prize for *Runaway*
- **2004**: Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize for *Runaway*
- **2004**: Trillium Book Award, English nomination for *Runaway*
- **2004**: Giller Prize for *The View from Castle Rock*
- **2005**: Commonwealth Writers Prize for Canada and the Caribbean Region shortlisted for *Runaway*
- **2006**: Edward MacDowell Medal for outstanding contribution to the arts by the MacDowell Colony
- **2007**: Commonwealth Writers Prize for Canada and the Caribbean Region shortlisted for *The View from Castle Rock*
- **2009**: Man Booker International Prize
- **2009**: Trillium Book Award, English nomination for *Too Much Happiness*
- **2013**: Trillium Book Award, English for *Dear Life*
- **2013**: Nobel Prize in Literature

Additionally, she was awarded the O. Henry Award for continuing achievement in short fiction in the U.S. for "Passion" (2006), "What Do You Want To Know For" (2008) and "Corrie" (2012)

- 1993: Royal Society of Canada's Lorne Pierce Medal
- 1997: Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters
- 2002: Elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature
- 2005: Medal of Honor for Literature from the U.S. National Arts Club
- 2010: Government of France – Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters
- 2014: Silver coin released by the Royal Canadian Mint in honour of Munro's Nobel Prize win
- 2015: Postage stamp released by Canada Post in honour of Munro's Nobel Prize win

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Videos

01] Alice Munro: Encore presentation of Nobel Prize Talks

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPdcjFQIy7k [46:10]

"It's the insight, the work, the way you give yourself to the story that matters." – We present a heartwarming chat with Canadian 'master of short stories' and literature laureate Alice Munro.

This conversation between the Nobel Prize's Adam Smith and Munro took place soon after she was awarded the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature. In the episode, she reflects on how she creates short stories, what these stories have meant to her and her readers and why she started writing. Munro also tells Smith what she hopes to achieve with her writing: conveying stories that resonate, as well as surprise, her readers.

Through their lives and work, failures and successes – get to know the individuals who have been awarded the Nobel Prize on the Nobel Prize Conversations podcast.

02] Alice Munro: What Will Be Remembered? | The Agenda | Full Episode

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdgApG_mfIw [56:59]

03] Alice Munro part 1: the PROSE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9XOPfs1KTY [1:03:41]

Have you heard of the Canadian legend but never read her? Or maybe she's your favorite writer! Either way, listen in to hear what makes her hilarious, incisive, mold-breaking stories so deserving of a NOBEL. This lecture--the first in a three-part exploration of Munro--gets nitty gritty in all the best ways. Delve with Kimberly into the elements that make her prose feel like nothing else on the planet. Whether you've read everything she wrote, or you're new to her work, you'll come away with a much richer appreciation of this absolute genius.

04] Lives of Girls and Women by Alice Munro's
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEXcGowK0xY [1:20:18]
05] Five Readers on the legacy of Alice Munro: hosted by Shawn Breathes Books
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjZzKI1d5Mw [46:33]

06] The Bear Came Over the Mountain read by Jennifer
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2gF53YZuJ8 [1:07:00]
07] Sarah Polley on AWAY FROM HER | Books on Film | TIFF 2020
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaJz-nqb1O0 [51:10]
Sarah Polley's exquisite adaptation of Alice Munro's short story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" provides a tremendous, touching showcase for two phenomenal performers at their best. Retired married couple Grant (Gordon Pinsent) and Fiona (Julie Christie) live comfortably in a house in the country, but their contentment is permanently disrupted when Fiona's memory starts to deteriorate. Determined not to saddle Grant with her declining health, Fiona insists upon going to a rest home — a choice that only causes Grant more pain. Though plagued by the notion that Fiona may be tormenting him for past misdeeds, he forges ahead, resolved to ensure his wife's comfort even as it causes him anguish. "A heartbreaking masterpiece … [Polley] emerges here as a director who is in calm command of almost impossible material" (Roger Ebert).
08] Anton Talarico | Definitive Analysis | Alice Munro's "To Reach Japan"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J49584ovyC4 [1:55:34]
"To Reach Japan" is an epic tale set in 1970's metropolitan Canada, and explores Greta's conflict between being a devoted housewife versus being a successful poet, a writer who challenges the status quo based on the simple merit of her profession. It is quite astonishing to think of the incredible journey Greta will take - through her psyche - and also via train - to Toronto - with a desire to reach Japan - and have her desires fulfilled. But what does this mean for her family? What does this mean for her husband and daughter, Katy? Can a poet be a person who gives and gives, or only an individual who takes and takes? It is really a universal question that irks at us all: are we content with being somewhat (or completely) unsatisfied with our lives? Or does it drive us "wild"? I am blown away by this text, and the detailed and unique images have always stuck in my mind reminding me of the deep symbolic meaning that they bring across - and I would imagine that is the testament to any writer engaged in the task of creative writing. Munro simply hits it out the ball park with this short story. It's quite a feat, in my personal opinion. Be sure to utilize the Table of Contents below, to make it easier to jump around from part to part as you feel the need. I hope you enjoy and find interesting - and useful - this detailed analysis of this short story. So, get some coffee, take a window-side seat, buckle up, and settle in for a journey as we attempt "To Reach Japan."

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24 May 1941

Aged 84 years

Bob Dylan

Nobel Prize in Literature 2016

Born: 24 May 1941, Duluth, MN, USA

Prize motivation:

"for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition"

Prize share: 1/1

{https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2016/dylan/facts}

Links to other sites

Website of Bob Dylan

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Photo Gallery

Kindly visit the Web Page to view the Photos

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2016/dylan/photo-gallery/

See all photos

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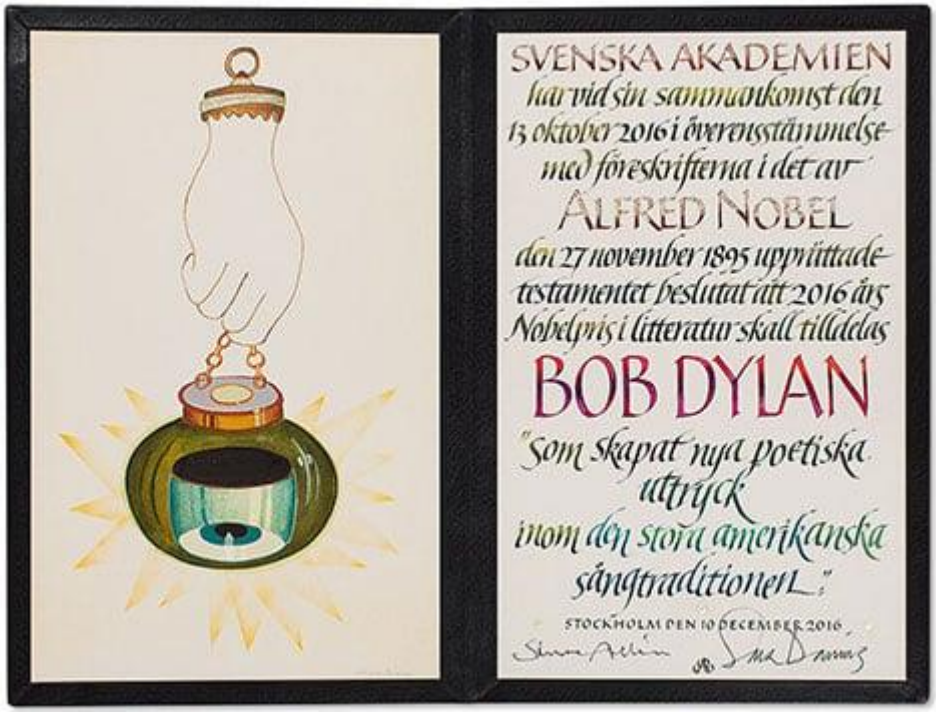
Nobel Diploma



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Prize Announcement

Announcement of the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature to Bob Dylan, presented by Professor Sara Danius, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, on 13 October 2016.

https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2016/prize-announcement/

Interview about the awarded work

"He can be read and should be read, and is a great poet in the English tradition". Following the announcement, Sara Danius, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, was interviewed by freelance journalist Sven Hugo Persson about the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature to Bob Dylan.

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Award Ceremony Speech

Presentation Speech by Professor Horace Engdahl, Member of the Swedish Academy, Member of the Nobel Committee for Literature, 10 December 2016.

Professor Horace Engdahl delivering the presentation speech for the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature at the Stockholm Concert Hall.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

What brings about the great shifts in the world of literature? Often it is when someone seizes upon a simple, overlooked form, discounted as art in the higher sense, and makes it mutate. Thus, at one point, emerged the modern novel from anecdote and letter, thus arose drama in a new age from high jinx on planks placed on barrels in a marketplace, thus songs in the vernacular dethroned learned Latin poetry, thus too did La Fontaine take animal fables and Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales from the nursery to Parnassian heights. Each time this occurs, our idea of literature changes.

In itself, it ought not to be a sensation that a singer/songwriter now stands recipient of the literary Nobel Prize. In a distant past, all poetry was sung or tunefully recited, poets were rhapsodes, bards, troubadours; 'lyrics' comes from 'lyre'. But what Bob Dylan did was not to return to the Greeks or the Provençals. Instead, he dedicated himself body and soul to 20th century American popular music, the kind played on radio stations and gramophone records for ordinary people, white and black: protest songs, country, blues, early rock, gospel, mainstream music. He listened day and night, testing the stuff on his instruments, trying to learn. But when he started to write similar songs, they came out differently. In his

hands, the material changed. From what he discovered in heirloom and scrap, in banal rhyme and quick wit, in curses and pious prayers, sweet nothings and crude jokes, he panned poetry gold, whether on purpose or by accident is irrelevant; all creativity begins in imitation.

Even after fifty years of uninterrupted exposure, we are yet to absorb music's equivalent of the fable's Flying Dutchman. He makes good rhymes, said a critic, explaining greatness. And it is true. His rhyming is an alchemical substance that dissolves contexts to create new ones, scarcely containable by the human brain. It was a shock. With the public expecting poppy folk songs, there stood a young man with a guitar, fusing the languages of the street and the bible into a compound that would have made the end of the world seem a superfluous replay. At the same time, he sang of love with a power of conviction everyone wants to own. All of a sudden, much of the bookish poetry in our world felt anaemic, and the routine song lyrics his colleagues continued to write were like old-fashioned gunpowder following the invention of dynamite. Soon, people stopped comparing him to Woody Guthrie and Hank Williams and turned instead to Blake, Rimbaud, Whitman, Shakespeare.

In the most unlikely setting of all – the commercial gramophone record – he gave back to the language of poetry its elevated style, lost since the Romantics. Not to sing of eternities, but to speak of what was happening around us. As if the oracle of Delphi were reading the evening news.

Recognising that revolution by awarding Bob Dylan the Nobel Prize was a decision that seemed daring only beforehand and already seems obvious. But does he get the prize for upsetting the system of literature? Not really. There is a simpler explanation, one that we share with all those who stand with beating hearts in front of the stage at one of the venues on his never-ending tour, waiting for that magical voice. Chamfort made the observation that when a master such as La Fontaine appears, the hierarchy of genres – the estimation of what is great and small, high and low in literature – is nullified. "What matter the rank of a work when its beauty is of the highest rank?" he wrote. That is the straight answer to the question of how Bob Dylan belongs in literature: as the beauty of his songs is of the highest rank.

By means of his oeuvre, Bob Dylan has changed our idea of what poetry can be and how it can work. He is a singer worthy of a place beside the Greeks' ἀοιδοί, beside Ovid, beside the Romantic visionaries, beside the kings and queens of the Blues, beside the forgotten masters of brilliant standards. If people in the literary world groan, one must remind them that the gods don't write, they dance and they sing. The good wishes of the Swedish Academy follow Mr. Dylan on his way to coming bandstands.

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The Nobel Prize Award Ceremony 2016

Watch the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony from the Stockholm Concert Hall in Sweden
10 December 2016.
https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2016/award-video/
[1:35:13]
Program for the Prize Award Ceremony (pdf)
Opening Address by Professor Carl-Henrik Heldin, Chairman of the Board of the Nobel Foundation

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Nobel Prize Lecture

Listen to Bob Dylan's Nobel Lecture on SoundCloud

Nobel Lecture

When I first received this Nobel Prize for Literature, I got to wondering exactly how my songs related to literature. I wanted to reflect on it and see where the connection was. I'm going to try to articulate that to you. And most likely it will go in a roundabout way, but I hope what I say will be worthwhile and purposeful.

If I was to go back to the dawning of it all, I guess I'd have to start with Buddy Holly. Buddy died when I was about eighteen and he was twenty-two. From the moment I first heard him, I felt akin. I felt related, like he was an older brother. I even thought I resembled him. Buddy played the music that I loved – the music I grew up on: country western, rock 'n' roll, and rhythm and blues. Three separate strands of music that he intertwined and infused into one genre. One brand. And Buddy wrote songs –

songs that had beautiful melodies and imaginative verses. And he sang great – sang in more than a few voices. He was the archetype. Everything I wasn't and wanted to be. I saw him only but once, and that was a few days before he was gone. I had to travel a hundred miles to get to see him play, and I wasn't disappointed.

He was powerful and electrifying and had a commanding presence. I was only six feet away. He was mesmerizing. I watched his face, his hands, the way he tapped his foot, his big black glasses, the eyes behind the glasses, the way he held his guitar, the way he stood, his neat suit. Everything about him. He looked older than twenty-two. Something about him seemed permanent, and he filled me with conviction. Then, out of the blue, the most uncanny thing happened. He looked me right straight dead in the eye, and he transmitted something. Something I didn't know what. And it gave me the chills.

I think it was a day or two after that that his plane went down. And somebody – somebody I'd never seen before – handed me a Leadbelly record with the song "Cottonfields" on it. And that record changed my life right then and there. Transported me into a world I'd never known. It was like an explosion went off. Like I'd been walking in darkness and all of the sudden the darkness was illuminated. It was like somebody laid hands on me. I must have played that record a hundred times.

It was on a label I'd never heard of with a booklet inside with advertisements for other artists on the label: Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, the New Lost City Ramblers, Jean Ritchie, string bands. I'd never heard of any of them. But I reckoned if they were on this label with Leadbelly, they had to be good, so I needed to hear them. I wanted to know all about it and play that kind of music. I still had a feeling for the music I'd grown up with, but for right now, I forgot about it. Didn't even think about it. For the time being, it was long gone.

I hadn't left home yet, but I couldn't wait to. I wanted to learn this music and meet the people who played it. Eventually, I did leave, and I did learn to play those songs. They were different than the radio songs that I'd been listening to all along. They were more vibrant and truthful to life. With radio songs, a performer might get a hit with a roll of the dice or a fall of the cards, but that didn't matter in the folk world. Everything was a hit. All you had to do was be well versed and be able to play the melody. Some of these songs were easy, some not. I had a natural feeling for the ancient ballads and country blues, but everything else I had to learn from scratch. I was playing for small crowds, sometimes no more than four or five people in a room or on a street corner. You had to have a wide repertoire, and you had to know what to play and when. Some songs were intimate, some you had to shout to be heard.

By listening to all the early folk artists and singing the songs yourself, you pick up the vernacular. You internalize it. You sing it in the ragtime blues, work songs, Georgia

sea shanties, Appalachian ballads and cowboy songs. You hear all the finer points, and you learn the details.

You know what it's all about. Takin' the pistol out and puttin' it back in your pocket. Whippin' your way through traffic, talkin' in the dark. You know that Stagger Lee was a bad man and that Frankie was a good girl. You know that Washington is a bourgeois town and you've heard the deep-pitched voice of John the Revelator and you saw the Titanic sink in a boggy creek. And you're pals with the wild Irish rover and the wild colonial boy. You heard the muffled drums and the fifes that played lowly. You've seen the lusty Lord Donald stick a knife in his wife, and a lot of your comrades have been wrapped in white linen.

I had all the vernacular down. I knew the rhetoric. None of it went over my head – the devices, the techniques, the secrets, the mysteries – and I knew all the deserted roads that it traveled on, too. I could make it all connect and move with the current of the day. When I started writing my own songs, the folk lingo was the only vocabulary that I knew, and I used it.

But I had something else as well. I had principles and sensibilities and an informed view of the world. And I had had that for a while. Learned it all in grammar school. *Don Quixote*, *Ivanhoe*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Tale of Two Cities,* all the rest – typical grammar school reading that gave you a way of looking at life, an understanding of human nature, and a standard to measure things by. I took all that with me when I started composing lyrics. And the themes from those books worked their way into many of my songs, either knowingly or unintentionally. I wanted to write songs unlike anything anybody ever heard, and these themes were fundamental. Specific books that have stuck with me ever since I read them way back in grammar school – I want to tell you about three of them: *Moby Dick, All Quiet on the Western Front* and *The Odyssey.*

Moby Dick is a fascinating book, a book that's filled with scenes of high drama and dramatic dialogue. The book makes demands on you. The plot is straightforward. The mysterious Captain Ahab – captain of a ship called the Pequod – an egomaniac with a peg leg pursuing his nemesis, the great white whale Moby Dick who took his leg. And he pursues him all the way from the Atlantic around the tip of Africa and into the Indian Ocean. He pursues the whale around both sides of the earth. It's an abstract goal, nothing concrete or definite. He calls Moby the emperor, sees him as the embodiment of evil. Ahab's got a wife and child back in Nantucket that he reminisces about now and again. You can anticipate what will happen.
The ship's crew is made up of men of different races, and any one of them who sights the whale will be given the reward of a gold coin. A lot of Zodiac symbols, religious allegory, stereotypes. Ahab encounters other whaling vessels, presses the captains for details about Moby. Have they seen him? There's a crazy prophet, Gabriel, on one of the vessels, and he predicts Ahab's doom. Says Moby is the incarnate of a Shaker god,

and that any dealings with him will lead to disaster. He says that to Captain Ahab. Another ship's captain – Captain Boomer – he lost an arm to Moby. But he tolerates that, and he's happy to have survived. He can't accept Ahab's lust for vengeance.

This book tells how different men react in different ways to the same experience. A lot of Old Testament, biblical allegory: Gabriel, Rachel, Jeroboam, Bildah, Elijah. Pagan names as well: Tashtego, Flask, Daggoo, Fleece, Starbuck, Stubb, Martha's Vineyard. The Pagans are idol worshippers. Some worship little wax figures, some wooden figures. Some worship fire. The Pequod is the name of an Indian tribe.

Moby Dick is a seafaring tale. One of the men, the narrator, says, "Call me Ishmael." Somebody asks him where he's from, and he says, "It's not down on any map. True places never are." Stubb gives no significance to anything, says everything is predestined. Ishmael's been on a sailing ship his entire life. Calls the sailing ships his Harvard and Yale. He keeps his distance from people.
A typhoon hits the Pequod. Captain Ahab thinks it's a good omen. Starbuck thinks it's a bad omen, considers killing Ahab. As soon as the storm ends, a crewmember falls from the ship's mast and drowns, foreshadowing what's to come. A Quaker pacifist priest, who is actually a bloodthirsty businessman, tells Flask, "Some men who receive injuries are led to God, others are led to bitterness."

Everything is mixed in. All the myths: the Judeo Christian bible, Hindu myths, British legends, Saint George, Perseus, Hercules – they're all whalers. Greek mythology, the gory business of cutting up a whale. Lots of facts in this book, geographical knowledge, whale oil – good for coronation of royalty – noble families in the whaling industry. Whale oil is used to anoint the kings. History of the whale, phrenology, classical philosophy, pseudo-scientific theories, justification for discrimination – everything thrown in and none of it hardly rational. Highbrow, lowbrow, chasing illusion, chasing death, the great white whale, white as polar bear, white as a white man, the emperor, the nemesis, the embodiment of evil. The demented captain who actually lost his leg years ago trying to attack Moby with a knife.

We see only the surface of things. We can interpret what lies below any way we see fit. Crewmen walk around on deck listening for mermaids, and sharks and vultures follow the ship. Reading skulls and faces like you read a book. Here's a face. I'll put it in front of you. Read it if you can.

Tashtego says that he died and was reborn. His extra days are a gift. He wasn't saved by Christ, though, he says he was saved by a fellow man and a non-Christian at that. He parodies the resurrection.

When Starbuck tells Ahab that he should let bygones be bygones, the angry captain snaps back, "Speak not to me of blasphemy, man, I'd strike the sun if it insulted me." Ahab, too, is a poet of eloquence. He says, "The path to my fixed purpose is laid with

iron rails whereon my soul is grooved to run." Or these lines, "All visible objects are but pasteboard masks." Quotable poetic phrases that can't be beat.

Finally, Ahab spots Moby, and the harpoons come out. Boats are lowered. Ahab's harpoon has been baptized in blood. Moby attacks Ahab's boat and destroys it. Next day, he sights Moby again. Boats are lowered again. Moby attacks Ahab's boat again. On the third day, another boat goes in. More religious allegory. He has risen. Moby attacks one more time, ramming the Pequod and sinking it. Ahab gets tangled up in the harpoon lines and is thrown out of his boat into a watery grave.

Ishmael survives. He's in the sea floating on a coffin. And that's about it. That's the whole story. That theme and all that it implies would work its way into more than a few of my songs.

All Quiet on the Western Front was another book that did. *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a horror story. This is a book where you lose your childhood, your faith in a meaningful world, and your concern for individuals. You're stuck in a nightmare. Sucked up into a mysterious whirlpool of death and pain. You're defending yourself from elimination. You're being wiped off the face of the map. Once upon a time you were an innocent youth with big dreams about being a concert pianist. Once you loved life and the world, and now you're shooting it to pieces.
Day after day, the hornets bite you and worms lap your blood. You're a cornered animal. You don't fit anywhere. The falling rain is monotonous. There's endless assaults, poison gas, nerve gas, morphine, burning streams of gasoline, scavenging and scabbing for food, influenza, typhus, dysentery. Life is breaking down all around you, and the shells are whistling. This is the lower region of hell. Mud, barbed wire, rat-filled trenches, rats eating the intestines of dead men, trenches filled with filth and excrement. Someone shouts, "Hey, you there. Stand and fight."

Who knows how long this mess will go on? Warfare has no limits. You're being annihilated, and that leg of yours is bleeding too much. You killed a man yesterday, and you spoke to his corpse. You told him after this is over, you'll spend the rest of your life looking after his family. Who's profiting here? The leaders and the generals gain fame, and many others profit financially. But you're doing the dirty work. One of your comrades says, "Wait a minute, where are you going?" And you say, "Leave me alone, I'll be back in a minute." Then you walk out into the woods of death hunting for a piece of sausage. You can't see how anybody in civilian life has any kind of purpose at all. All their worries, all their desires – you can't comprehend it.

More machine guns rattle, more parts of bodies hanging from wires, more pieces of arms and legs and skulls where butterflies perch on teeth, more hideous wounds, pus coming out of every pore, lung wounds, wounds too big for the body, gas-blowing cadavers, and dead bodies making retching noises. Death is everywhere. Nothing else

is possible. Someone will kill you and use your dead body for target practice. Boots, too. They're your prized possession. But soon they'll be on somebody else's feet.

There's Froggies coming through the trees. Merciless bastards. Your shells are running out. "It's not fair to come at us again so soon," you say. One of your companions is laying in the dirt, and you want to take him to the field hospital. Someone else says, "You might save yourself a trip." "What do you mean?" "Turn him over, you'll see what I mean."

You wait to hear the news. You don't understand why the war isn't over. The army is so strapped for replacement troops that they're drafting young boys who are of little military use, but they're draftin' 'em anyway because they're running out of men. Sickness and humiliation have broken your heart. You were betrayed by your parents, your schoolmasters, your ministers, and even your own government.

The general with the slowly smoked cigar betrayed you too – turned you into a thug and a murderer. If you could, you'd put a bullet in his face. The commander as well. You fantasize that if you had the money, you'd put up a reward for any man who would take his life by any means necessary. And if he should lose his life by doing that, then let the money go to his heirs. The colonel, too, with his caviar and his coffee – he's another one. Spends all his time in the officers' brothel. You'd like to see him stoned dead too. More Tommies and Johnnies with their whack fo' me daddy-o and their whiskey in the jars. You kill twenty of 'em and twenty more will spring up in their place. It just stinks in your nostrils.

You've come to despise that older generation that sent you out into this madness, into this torture chamber. All around you, your comrades are dying. Dying from abdominal wounds, double amputations, shattered hipbones, and you think, "I'm only twenty years old, but I'm capable of killing anybody. Even my father if he came at me."

Yesterday, you tried to save a wounded messenger dog, and somebody shouted, "Don't be a fool." One Froggy is laying gurgling at your feet. You stuck him with a dagger in his stomach, but the man still lives. You know you should finish the job, but you can't. You're on the real iron cross, and a Roman soldier's putting a sponge of vinegar to your lips.

Months pass by. You go home on leave. You can't communicate with your father. He said, "You'd be a coward if you don't enlist." Your mother, too, on your way back out the door, she says, "You be careful of those French girls now." More madness. You fight for a week or a month, and you gain ten yards. And then the next month it gets taken back.

All that culture from a thousand years ago, that philosophy, that wisdom – Plato, Aristotle, Socrates – what happened to it? It should have prevented this. Your thoughts turn homeward. And once again you're a schoolboy walking through the tall poplar trees. It's a pleasant memory. More bombs dropping on you from blimps. You got to get it together now. You can't even look at anybody for fear of some miscalculable thing that might happen. The common grave. There are no other possibilities.

Then you notice the cherry blossoms, and you see that nature is unaffected by all this. Poplar trees, the red butterflies, the fragile beauty of flowers, the sun – you see how nature is indifferent to it all. All the violence and suffering of all mankind. Nature doesn't even notice it.

You're so alone. Then a piece of shrapnel hits the side of your head and you're dead. You've been ruled out, crossed out. You've been exterminated. I put this book down and closed it up. I never wanted to read another war novel again, and I never did.

Charlie Poole from North Carolina had a song that connected to all this. It's called "You Ain't Talkin' to Me," and the lyrics go like this:

I saw a sign in a window walking up town one day.
Join the army, see the world is what it had to say.
You'll see exciting places with a jolly crew,
You'll meet interesting people, and learn to kill them too.
Oh you ain't talkin' to me, you ain't talking to me.
I may be crazy and all that, but I got good sense you see.
You ain't talkin' to me, you ain't talkin' to me.
Killin' with a gun don't sound like fun.
You ain't talkin' to me.

The Odyssey is a great book whose themes have worked its way into the ballads of a lot of songwriters: "Homeward Bound, "Green, Green Grass of Home," "Home on the Range," and my songs as well.

The Odyssey is a strange, adventurous tale of a grown man trying to get home after fighting in a war. He's on that long journey home, and it's filled with traps and pitfalls. He's cursed to wander. He's always getting carried out to sea, always having close calls. Huge chunks of boulders rock his boat. He angers people he shouldn't. There's troublemakers in his crew. Treachery. His men are turned into pigs and then are turned back into younger, more handsome men. He's always trying to rescue somebody. He's a travelin' man, but he's making a lot of stops.

He's stranded on a desert island. He finds deserted caves, and he hides in them. He meets giants that say, "I'll eat you last." And he escapes from giants. He's trying to get back home, but he's tossed and turned by the winds. Restless winds, chilly winds, unfriendly winds. He travels far, and then he gets blown back.

He's always being warned of things to come. Touching things he's told not to. There's two roads to take, and they're both bad. Both hazardous. On one you could drown and on the other you could starve. He goes into the narrow straits with foaming whirlpools that swallow him. Meets six-headed monsters with sharp fangs. Thunderbolts strike at him. Overhanging branches that he makes a leap to reach for to save himself from a raging river. Goddesses and gods protect him, but some others want to kill him. He changes identities. He's exhausted. He falls asleep, and he's woken up by the sound of laughter. He tells his story to strangers. He's been gone twenty years. He was carried off somewhere and left there. Drugs have been dropped into his wine. It's been a hard road to travel.

In a lot of ways, some of these same things have happened to you. You too have had drugs dropped into your wine. You too have shared a bed with the wrong woman. You too have been spellbound by magical voices, sweet voices with strange melodies. You too have come so far and have been so far blown back. And you've had close calls as well. You have angered people you should not have. And you too have rambled this country all around. And you've also felt that ill wind, the one that blows you no good. And that's still not all of it.

When he gets back home, things aren't any better. Scoundrels have moved in and are taking advantage of his wife's hospitality. And there's too many of 'em. And though he's greater than them all and the best at everything – best carpenter, best hunter, best expert on animals, best seaman – his courage won't save him, but his trickery will.

All these stragglers will have to pay for desecrating his palace. He'll disguise himself as a filthy beggar, and a lowly servant kicks him down the steps with arrogance and stupidity. The servant's arrogance revolts him, but he controls his anger. He's one against a hundred, but they'll all fall, even the strongest. He was nobody. And when it's all said and done, when he's home at last, he sits with his wife, and he tells her the stories.

So what does it all mean? Myself and a lot of other songwriters have been influenced by these very same themes. And they can mean a lot of different things. If a song moves you, that's all that's important. I don't have to know what a song means. I've written all kinds of things into my songs. And I'm not going to worry about it – what it all means. When Melville put all his old testament, biblical references, scientific theories, Protestant doctrines, and all that knowledge of the sea and sailing ships and

whales into one story, I don't think he would have worried about it either – what it all means.

John Donne as well, the poet-priest who lived in the time of Shakespeare, wrote these words, "The Sestos and Abydos of her breasts. Not of two lovers, but two loves, the nests." I don't know what it means, either. But it sounds good. And you want your songs to sound good.

When Odysseus in *The Odyssey* visits the famed warrior Achilles in the underworld – Achilles, who traded a long life full of peace and contentment for a short one full of honor and glory – tells Odysseus it was all a mistake. "I just died, that's all." There was no honor. No immortality. And that if he could, he would choose to go back and be a lowly slave to a tenant farmer on Earth rather than be what he is – a king in the land of the dead – that whatever his struggles of life were, they were preferable to being here in this dead place.

That's what songs are too. Our songs are alive in the land of the living. But songs are unlike literature. They're meant to be sung, not read. The words in Shakespeare's plays were meant to be acted on the stage. Just as lyrics in songs are meant to be sung, not read on a page. And I hope some of you get the chance to listen to these lyrics the way they were intended to be heard: in concert or on record or however people are listening to songs these days. I return once again to Homer, who says, "Sing in me, oh Muse, and through me tell the story."

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Banquet Speech

Bob Dylan's speech at the Nobel Banquet in the Stockholm City Hall on 10 December 2016, was given by the United States Ambassador to Sweden Azita Raji.

Nobel Banquet Speech, 10 December 2016

Good evening, everyone. I extend my warmest greetings to the members of the Swedish Academy and to all of the other distinguished guests in attendance tonight.

I'm sorry I can't be with you in person, but please know that I am most definitely with you in spirit and honored to be receiving such a prestigious

prize. Being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature is something I never could have imagined or seen coming. From an early age, I've been familiar with and reading and absorbing the works of those who were deemed worthy of such a distinction: Kipling, Shaw, Thomas Mann, Pearl Buck, Albert Camus, Hemingway. These giants of literature whose works are taught in the schoolroom, housed in libraries around the world and spoken of in reverent tones have always made a deep impression. That I now join the names on such a list is truly beyond words.

I don't know if these men and women ever thought of the Nobel honor for themselves, but I suppose that anyone writing a book, or a poem, or a play anywhere in the world might harbor that secret dream deep down inside. It's probably buried so deep that they don't even know it's there.

If someone had ever told me that I had the slightest chance of winning the Nobel Prize, I would have to think that I'd have about the same odds as standing on the moon. In fact, during the year I was born and for a few years after, there wasn't anyone in the *world* who was considered good enough to win this Nobel Prize. So, I recognize that I am in very rare company, to say the least.

I was out on the road when I received this surprising news, and it took me more than a few minutes to properly process it. I began to think about William Shakespeare, the great literary figure. I would reckon he thought of himself as a dramatist. The thought that he was writing literature couldn't have entered his head. His words were written for the stage. Meant to be spoken not read. When he was writing Hamlet, I'm sure he was thinking about a lot of different things: "Who're the right actors for these roles?" "How should this be staged?" "Do I really want to set this in Denmark?" His creative vision and ambitions were no doubt at the forefront of his mind, but there were also more mundane matters to consider and deal with. "Is the financing in place?" "Are there enough good seats for my patrons?" "Where am I going to get a human skull?" I would bet that the farthest thing from Shakespeare's mind was the question "Is this *literature*?"

When I started writing songs as a teenager, and even as I started to achieve some renown for my abilities, my aspirations for these songs only went so far. I thought they could be heard in coffee houses or bars, maybe later in places like Carnegie Hall, the London Palladium. If I was really dreaming big, maybe I could imagine getting to make a record and then hearing my songs on the radio. That was really the big prize in my mind. Making records and hearing your songs on the radio meant that you were reaching a big audience and that you might get to keep doing what you had set out to do.

Well, I've been doing what I set out to do for a long time, now. I've made dozens of records and played thousands of concerts all around the world.

But it's my songs that are at the vital center of almost everything I do. They seemed to have found a place in the lives of many people throughout many different cultures and I'm grateful for that.

But there's one thing I must say. As a performer I've played for 50,000 people and I've played for 50 people and I can tell you that it is harder to play for 50 people. 50,000 people have a singular persona, not so with 50. Each person has an individual, separate identity, a world unto themselves. They can perceive things more clearly. Your honesty and how it relates to the depth of your talent is tried. The fact that the Nobel committee is so small is not lost on me.

But, like Shakespeare, I too am often occupied with the pursuit of my creative endeavors and dealing with all aspects of life's mundane matters. "Who are the best musicians for these songs?" "Am I recording in the right studio?" "Is this song in the right key?" Some things never change, even in 400 years.

Not once have I ever had the time to ask myself, "Are my songs *literature*?" So, I do thank the Swedish Academy, both for taking the time to consider that very question, and, ultimately, for providing such a wonderful answer.

My best wishes to you all,

Bob Dylan

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Biobibliographical Notes

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

Bob Dylan was born on May 24, 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota. He grew up in a Jewish middle-class family in the city of Hibbing. As a teenager he played in various bands and with time his interest in music deepened, with a particular passion for American folk music and blues. One of his idols was the folk singer Woody Guthrie. He was also influenced by the early authors of the Beat Generation, as well as by modernist poets.

Dylan moved to New York City in 1961 and began to perform in clubs and cafés in Greenwich Village. He met the record producer John Hammond with whom he signed a contract for his debut album, *Bob Dylan* (1962). In the following years he recorded a number of albums which have had a tremendous impact on popular music: *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited* in 1965, *Blonde On Blonde* in 1966 and *Blood On The Tracks* in 1975. His productivity continued in the following decades, resulting in masterpieces like *Oh Mercy* (1989), *Time Out Of Mind* (1997) and *Modern Times* (2006).

Dylan's tours in 1965 and 1966 attracted a lot of attention. For a period he was accompanied by film maker D. A. Pennebaker, who documented life around the stage in what would come to be the movie *Dont Look Back* (1967). Dylan has recorded a large number of albums revolving around topics such as: the social conditions of man, religion, politics and love. The lyrics have continuously been published in new editions, under the title *Lyrics*. As an artist, he is strikingly versatile; he has been active as painter, actor and scriptwriter.

Besides his large production of albums, Dylan has published experimental work like *Tarantula* (1971) and the collection *Writings and Drawings* (1973). He has written an autobiography, *Chronicles* (2004), which depicts memories from the early years in New York and which provides glimpses of his life at the center of popular culture. Since the late 1980s, Bob Dylan has toured persistently, an undertaking called the "Never-Ending Tour". Dylan has the status of an icon. His influence on contemporary music is profound, and he is the object of a steady stream of secondary literature.

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Blonde On Blonde (1966)
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John Wesley Harding (1968)
Nashville Skyline (1969)
Self Portrait (1970)
New Morning (1970)
Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits Vol. 2 (1971)
Pat Garrett & Billy The Kid (1973)
Dylan (1973)
Planet Waves (1974)
Before The Flood (1974)
Blood On The Tracks (1975)
The Basement Tapes (1975)
Desire (1976)

Hard Rain (1976)
Street Legal (1978)
Bob Dylan At Budokan (1978)
Slow Train Coming (1979)
Saved (1980)
Shot Of Love (1981)
Infidels (1983)
Real Live (1984)
Empire Burlesque (1985)
Biograph (1985)
Knocked Out Loaded (1986)
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Dylan & The Dead (1989)
Oh Mercy (1989)
Under The Red Sky (1990)
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Good As I Been to You (1992)
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The Original Mono Recordings (2010)
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Press Release

SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

The Permanent Secretary
Press release
13 October 2016

The Nobel Prize in Literature 2016
Bob Dylan

The Nobel Prize in Literature for 2016 is awarded to Bob Dylan
"for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition".
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BOB DYLAN CENTER, TULSA OK

{https://bobdylancenter.com/about/biography/}

About Bob Dylan

Bob Dylan is one of our culture's most influential and groundbreaking artists. In the decades since he first burst into the public's consciousness via New York City's Greenwich Village folk music scene in the early 1960s, Bob Dylan has sold more than 125 million records around the world and amassed a singular body of work that includes some of the greatest and most popular songs the world has ever known.

Early Years

Born in Duluth, Minnesota, on May 24, 1941, most of Dylan's childhood was spent in the iron-mining town of Hibbing. Dylan taught himself piano and guitar and played in several bands, attending the University of Minnesota for one year in 1959. He moved to New York in 1961 — heavily influenced by Woody Guthrie and other American folk artists — and began to play at various clubs in the burgeoning folk music scene of Greenwich Village. Signed to Columbia Records by renowned A&R executive John Hammond in 1961, he released his self-titled debut album in 1962.

Live Performances

Many of Dylan's early songs were made famous by other artists, such as Joan Baez and Peter, Paul & Mary, whose versions of his classic compositions "Blowin' In The Wind" and "The Times They Are A Changin'" helped bring the young artist to a larger audience.

From his earliest performances in Greenwich Village coffee houses, folk festivals and rallies in the early 1960s to his stadium rock concerts of the 1970s and subsequent annual international tours, Dylan established an enduring reputation as one of the world's great live performers.

Dylan's Musical Catalog and Cultural Contribution

He has released more than 50 albums and has written more than 600 songs, some of the most famous being the aforementioned "Blowin' in the Wind," "Like A Rolling Stone," "All Along The Watchtower," "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" and "Make You Feel My Love." His songs have been covered more than 6,000 times by artists as diverse as Duke Ellington, Jimi Hendrix, Guns N' Roses, Stevie Wonder, Rod Stewart, the Staple Singers, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Bob Marley, Pearl Jam, Neil Young, Adele and U2.

Dylan's contributions to worldwide culture have been recognized and honored numerous times. He received an honorary doctorate of music from Princeton University, New Jersey, in 1970 and another from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, in 2004. President Clinton presented him with a Kennedy Center Honor at the White House in 1997, recognizing the excellence of his contribution to American culture.

Awards and Accolades

In October 2016, Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature by the Swedish Academy "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition." In 2012, he was awarded America's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, by President Barack Obama. In addition to winning 10 Grammy Awards, Dylan has achieved six entries in the Grammy Hall of Fame, which honors recordings of "qualitative or historical significance" at least 25-years-old.

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Bob Dylan Discography

{https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Dylan_discography}

American singer-songwriter Bob Dylan has released 40 studio albums, 21 live albums, 18 volumes of *The Bootleg Series*, 44 compilation albums, seven soundtracks as main contributor, 24 notable extended plays, 105 singles, 61 music videos, 17 music home videos, and two non-music home videos. His albums were released by Columbia Records, except for *Planet Waves* and *Before the Flood*, which were released on Asylum Records and later reissued by Columbia. Much of his music has been bootlegged; see Bob Dylan bootleg recordings. Dylan has posted many recordings and videos to his YouTube channel.

Dylan has been the subject of 11 documentaries, starred in three theatrical films; appeared in other 36 films, documentaries, and home videos; and is the subject of the semi-biographical tribute films *I'm Not There* and *A Complete Unknown*. He has written and published lyrics, artwork, and memoirs in 11 books; three of his songs have been made into children's books. He has done numerous concert and media appearances, joined collaborative projects, and contributed to tribute albums.

Please visit the *cited Web Page* for the List of Albums

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List of Songs written by Bob Dylan

{https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_songs_written_by_Bob_Dylan}

This list contains songs written by American singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, including those where he is credited as co-author. The list omits traditional songs where Dylan has claimed arranger's copyright.

Please visit the *cited Web Page* for the List of Songs

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List of Awards and Nominations

{https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_awards_and_nominations_received_by_Bob_Dylan}

Bob Dylan awards and nominations

Dylan with President Barack Obama in 2012

Awards and nominations

Totals	
Wins	15
Nominations	49

Bob Dylan is an American singer-songwriter, author and visual artist. Over his career he has received many accolades throughout his long career as a songwriter

and performing artist. Dylan's professional career began in 1961 when he signed with Columbia Records. Fifty-five years later, in 2016, Dylan continued to release new recordings and was the first musician to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Dylan has received 10 competitive Grammy Awards and a Lifetime Achievement Grammy. He received his first Grammy Award nomination for Best Folk Recording for his debut studio album *Bob Dylan* (1962). Dylan has won two Grammy Awards for Album of the Year for *The Concert for Bangladesh* (1973) and *Time Out of Mind* (1997). For his song "Gotta Serve Somebody" in 1980 he won the Grammy Award for Best Male Rock Vocal Performance. He won Grammy Awards for his Folk Albums, *World Gone Wrong* in 1995, *Time Out of Mind* (1997), *Love and Theft* (2001), and *Modern Times* (2006). For the songs "Cold Irons Bound" (1998) and "Someday Baby" (2006) he won twice for Best Rock Vocal Performance.

On film, he wrote the music and composed the score for the Sam Peckinpah directed revisionist western *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973) for which he was nominated for the BAFTA Award for Best Original Music. Dylan earned acclaim for writing the song "Things Have Changed" for the Curtis Hanson directed comedy-drama film *Wonder Boys* (2000) for which he earned the Academy Award for Best Original Song and the Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song as well as a nomination for the Grammy Award for Best Song Written for Visual Media.

Throughout his career, Dylan has received various honorary awards including the National Medal of Arts in 2009 and Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012 both given to him by the 44th president of the United States Barack Obama. He has also been honored with the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1992, the Kennedy Center Honors in 1997, a Pulitzer Prize Citation in 2008, and a Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016. He was made both an Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres in 1990 and Officier de la Legion d'honneur in 2013. He was inducted in both The Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1982 and The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988. Five of his songs were listed in as being one of the 500 songs that shaped rock and roll.

Please visit the *cited Web Page* for the List of Awards, Honours, etc.,

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Videos

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https://www.imdb.com/list/ls047694257/
Containing 33 movies and documentaries

02] A Complete Unknown | Bob Dylan and the Biopic Formula
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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBYW8Ce-d6U [1:39:01]

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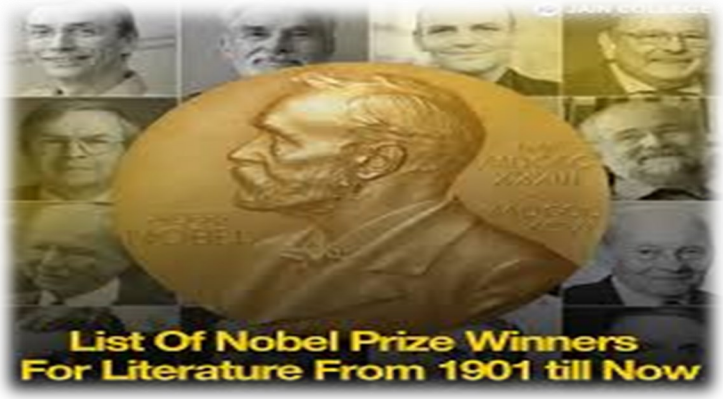

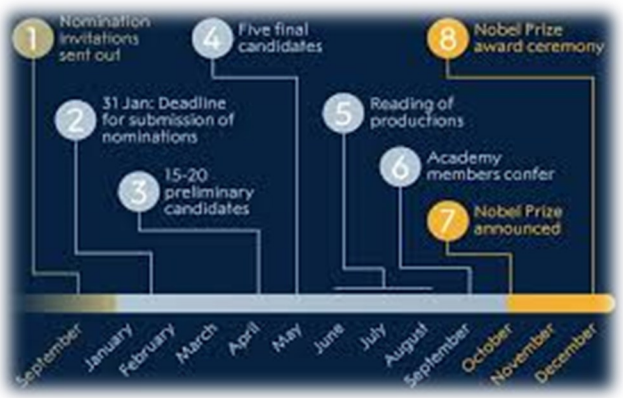

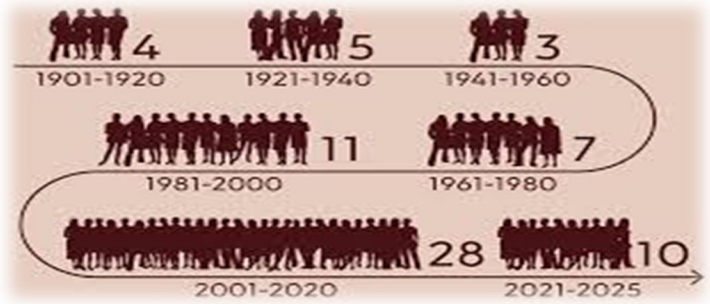

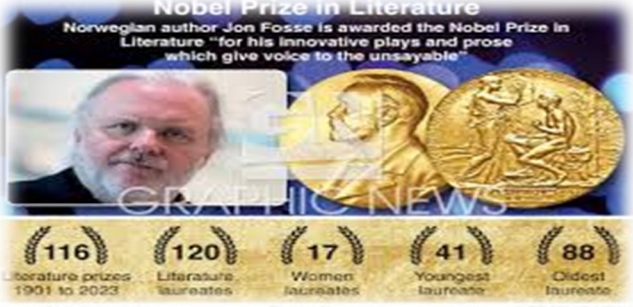

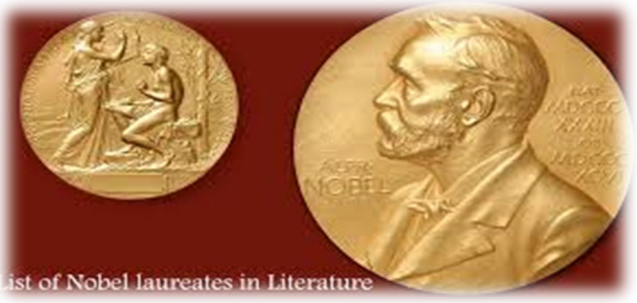

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